

I LEAP
BEFORE
I LOOK



DAVID
HAIG-THOMAS

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I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK



Frontispiece

AFTER A MORNING'S FLIGHT—THE BARNACLE GOOSE
UNDER MY ARM IS STILL ALIVE

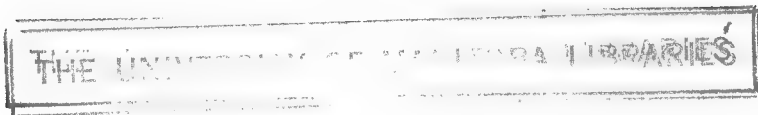
I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

Sport at Home and Abroad

By

DAVID HAIG-THOMAS

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TO
MY FRIENDS
BLACK AND WHITE

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I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

I

FIRST LEAPS

I CAN REMEMBER sitting on the nursery window-sill watching the rain-drops trickling down the pane. It was boring, but there was nothing else to do; I longed to go out and ride my brother's new bicycle, which had been given him on his birthday. I was only five years old, and could almost ride. I was quite certain that to-day I should be all right. I can remember looking up at the sloping ceiling of the old Elizabethan house, where Dame Alice Lisle had hidden fugitives till she was caught and beheaded by Judge Jeffreys. I knew all about her. My thoughts wandered to an underground passage which was supposed to connect Moyles Court with the little church at Ellingham. It had always been my ambition to search for it and explore it. But the doors to this cellar were always locked and I was never allowed to go and look for it. I can remember seeing a very tall tree which stuck out far above the others in Newlands Wood; beyond it I imagined lay France or Africa or the North Pole, the only three places that I thought existed outside the little world I lived in.

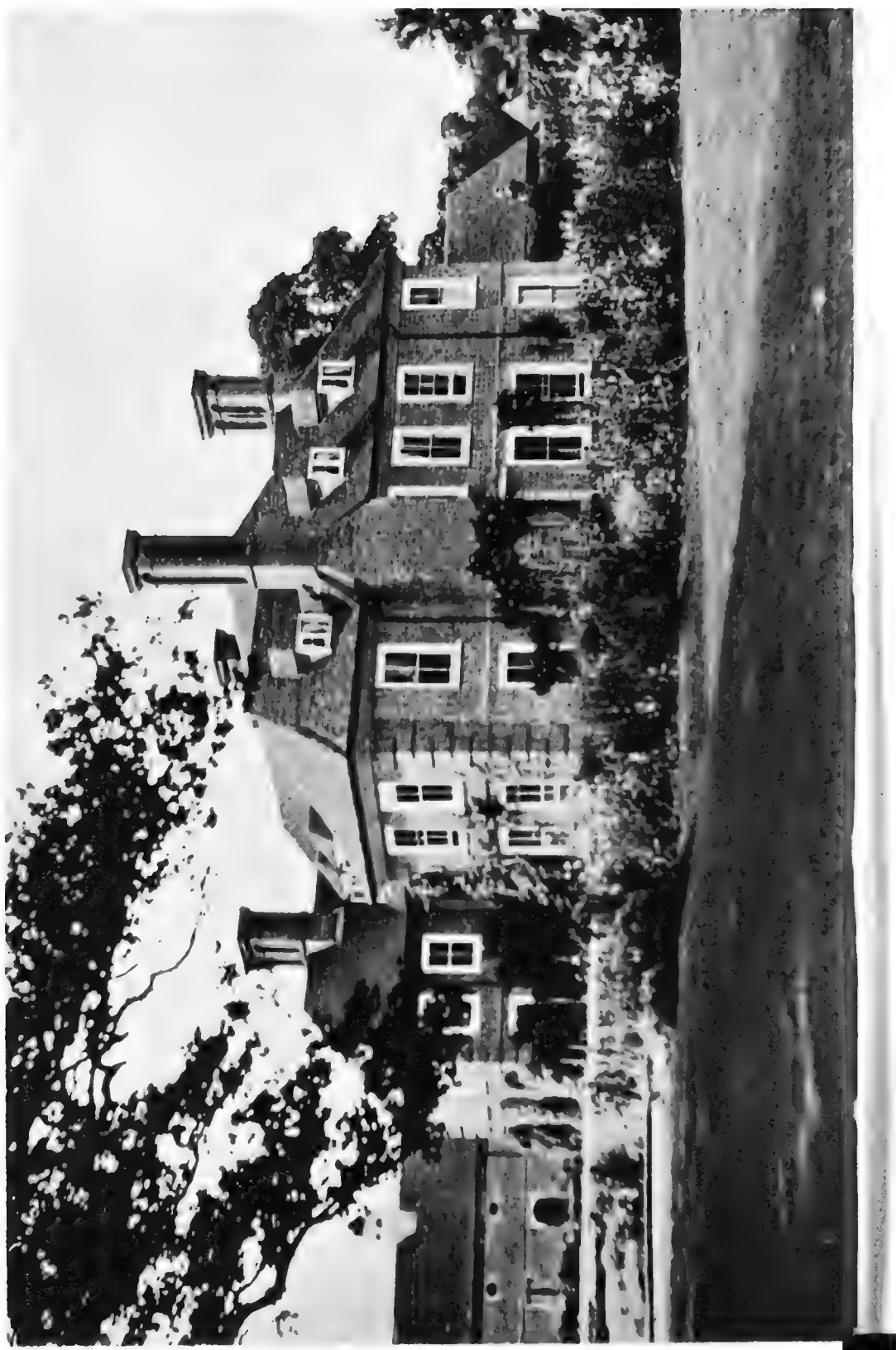
At last the rain stopped and the sun shone. With

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great impatience I waited for my brother to finish his turn on the bike. I saw his little legs pedalling down the drive. He turned at the gate and came back. Now it was my turn, and I was helped on the bike. It seemed to me that I went at a great speed. Surely this was the perfect thing for exploring the outside world. For once and for all I would finish with the nursery, bibs, and going to bed at half-past six. It was warm and bright and the whole world lay before me. I reached the end of the drive, and after several bad wobbles in which I very nearly crashed I came out on to the road. It was before the days of tarmac, and I can remember hearing the ping of little flints from under the tyres. I can remember now the thrill and excitement as I pedalled on. Only faintly could I hear the shouts of my nurse. I laughed and chuckled to myself with excitement. Where I was bound for I had no idea, but I pedalled on down the road as fast as my little legs would go, and I was soon panting and perspiring. I threw off my hat, a ridiculous thing, more of a bonnet than a hat, in which I always felt ashamed when everyone stopped and said "the dear little fellow." I can remember seeing it now as it lay on the side of the road, its ridiculous silk ribbons flapping in the breeze. I don't suppose I went half a mile from the end of the drive, though it seemed then a tremendous journey.

Round the corner and under an old oak-tree on a little grass patch was a gipsy encampment. In a second

MOYLES COURT, WHERE I SPENT MY CHILDHOOD



FIRST LEAPS

my future career was settled: I would be a gipsy; nothing seemed easier than to join these romantic people. Never for a moment did it occur to me that they would say no or that they did not think that I would make a good gipsy. I tried to stop, but I had not yet learned to get off, and I fell. An old gipsy lifted me up; what she said I can't remember, but I can remember seeing the ponies and the caravans and the rough-haired lurchers and the fire, over which hung a kettle from a tripod.

My heaven was not to last long, and in a few minutes a hot, angry, and rather frightened nurse came tearing down the road. I was seized, and received a good smacking then and there in front of the gipsies; and, even a bigger disgrace, I was not allowed to ride the bike back home, but had to push it while my nurse lectured me on my wickedness and told me that the gipsies would have kidnapped me and hung me in a sack under their cart. What else happened I cannot remember, except that I was sent to bed, but next morning there were tales of a free fight that had taken place between one of the keepers and the gipsies. The gipsies, I was told, had committed the terrible crime of poaching some rabbits with their lurchers. When they were caught one had hit the keeper on the nose and broken it. I felt sorry for the gipsies, partly because I thought that there were plenty of rabbits and why shouldn't the gipsies have some, and partly because the keeper had got me into trouble. He had

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shown me a pheasant's nest, and almost as soon as he was out of sight I decided that I would have a collection of birds' eggs and I would start with the pheasant's—a decision which resulted in more punishment and disgrace.

Of all my years of childhood this, my first expedition alone, stands out clear among boring memories of schoolroom days until I went to Eton, and I made up my mind that as soon as possible when I had grown up I would do all the things that I had not been allowed to do. I would be a gipsy. I would poach. I would travel about and see the world.

It was the first Sunday after long leave, which is our week-end holiday in the middle of the term. Eton looked depressing. Of all the days in the week I disliked Sundays most. We were not allowed to play games, and there seemed nothing to be done which did not eventually lead one into trouble.

A few days before, my father had driven me to Eton through Windsor Park, and I noticed how plentiful and how tame the pheasants seemed to be. Like nearly every other little boy after long leave I had money in my pocket, and the day before I had bought a quaint old pistol from an antique furnishing shop. It was only necessary to get some caps, black gunpowder, and shot from a little shop just by Windsor Bridge and I was ready for a day's "shootin'." These I had got, and after testing the pistol in the morning under the



MYSELF A SMALL BOY OF FIVE AT MOYLES COURT

FIRST LEAPS

G.W.R. arches, a place where I was unlikely to be caught, I found that two teaspoonfuls of gunpowder, a wad of new bread, and either one catapult bullet or a spoonful of shot made the most effective load. I rushed out to boys' dinner, and after meeting a friend of mine at Burning Bush we walked as fast as we could over the Bridge, up Windsor Hill, and into the Park.

My companion, who was more ambitious than myself, suggested shooting a stag, of which there seemed to be a good supply. I pointed out that if we did shoot one there would be no chance of getting it away, or even its horns, for that matter; but that if we managed to get a pheasant we could have it cooked and eat it for tea.

The pheasants which had appeared so tame from the car were very much harder to get near when walking. We tried several shots, using catapults at fairly long ranges, without the slightest success. When the pistol did go off it was very frightening. The cap went off first; then there was a pause before the rest of the powder got alight. Quite frequently it misfired—in fact, more often than not. A new cap was quickly put on, the hammer pulled back, and the pistol fired again.

It soon became quite clear that unless we could get a car of some kind we should get no pheasants. The afternoon was getting on and we had not more than another twenty minutes before we must go back to Chapel.

Suddenly the idea struck me that we might get

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

someone to drive us along the road in their car and allow us to shoot out of the window. Two or three cars stopped at our signal, but they were owned by people completely devoid of any sporting instincts. At last along came an old Morris driven by a man with a brown face and a twinkle in his eye, which seemed to say that although he was grown up he remembered his boyhood days and was still out for a lark. I held up my hand and the car stopped.

“Well, what do you two boys want?” I took off my hat—I was a very polite little boy in those days : “Please, sir, we want to try and shoot one of those pheasants; we can’t get near them if we walk. Could you drive us along in your car and let us have a try out of the window?” I produced my pistol and he smiled. “All right, jump in,” he said.

We cruised along at five or ten miles an hour. He seemed to enter into the fun of it just as much as we did, and was always looking round to see if there were keepers or anybody looking. We had a shot at two pheasants not five yards away. What happened I don’t know, as it looked impossible to miss, but somehow the birds were not touched.

But now, being almost desperate, I put in a double charge of gunpowder and filled up the barrel as much as I could with shot. An extra fat pheasant was sitting on the side of the road just ahead. The car drew up—he was only a few feet away; I pointed and fired. The cap didn’t go off, so I hurriedly put another in and

FIRST LEAPS

fired again. There was a tremendous bang, and I dropped the pistol and the pheasant flapped its wings, lay on its back, and went on flapping. One shot had penetrated its eye. I leapt out of the car, grabbed the pheasant, and after tying up its head in my handkerchief to stop the bleeding, I put it in my top hat; and my friend and I, after thanking the man, started to walk back to Eton. Suddenly I remembered that we were really being rather selfish, and that we should have offered the pheasant to the man who had helped us to get it; we turned back, but he had already gone. I got to m'tutors, and after hiding the pheasant in my room went off to Chapel. The first thing next morning I took it down to Rowlands to be cooked, and we each had half for tea.

A week or two went by and the Christmas term was nearly over. Trials were drawing near, and as usual I was sure to fail. I only did just enough work to keep me out of the worst of trouble during the term, and now it was within ten days of Trials, the examinations at the end of term, and I realised that if I failed again and didn't get my remove I should be superannuated. It seemed an impossibility to try and learn the term's work in ten days, and I began to think out ways and means of defeating the examiners by other methods. If I failed in the Trials and was superannuated I should be very miserable, as I really loved Eton, and by passing I did nobody any harm. It

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

wasn't as if it was a competitive exam, with a prize to be gained. After all, the exam was set to test our wits, and surely getting trial papers in advance of the fatal day was a more exciting test of one's wits than working like a flock of sheep all through the term.

I knew that the papers were being printed in Spottiswoode's printing press. I had peered through the window and had seen them. A friend of mine had actually been able to read one question of his paper as it lay on the press. This whetted my appetite. Why not find a way in when there was nobody there and get all the questions? The Sunday before Trials I decided was the best day to make the attempt. A day or two before, so that I might know my way about, I asked to be shown round the printing press.

I thought that the best time to make the attempt was after the bells had started to ring for Chapel. Everybody would be on their way there and there was no likelihood of anyone being near the press. I knew exactly how long it would take me if I ran as hard as I could from Spottiswoode's to Chapel. Whatever happened I must be in time for Chapel, for if it was discovered that someone had been to Spottiswoode's and someone had also missed Chapel, it wouldn't be difficult to put two and two together.

A minute or two before the bells had started to ring my brother and I were by the windows. Two other

FIRST LEAPS

friends came to keep watch at the corners. The time had come. I knew my burglar stuff pretty well from reading detective stories, and wore gloves in case anyone should find finger-prints. I picked up a stone and threw it through the window just by the handle. It was the work of a few minutes to put my arm through the hole, open the window, and leap inside. I did not lose my head, thank goodness, and the first thing I did was to close the window, and lucky it was that I did so. I had only just started to look through the mass of Trial papers, which were lying about everywhere, when a warning came from outside to say that there were two masters coming along. They would pass by on their way to Chapel. I dived down behind the desk; even if someone had come into the room I should have had a reasonable chance of remaining hidden. They stopped outside the broken window and I heard snatches of their conversation: "I wonder who did that?" and another voice saying, "I don't suppose it was done on purpose; it was probably only a catapult." I trembled in my hiding-place. Would they guess that someone had got in and was hiding inside? Then I heard footsteps walking away and once more I began to breathe, for I had held my breath all the time they were outside in case they should hear the slightest sound.

How exciting it was! I enviously thought of burglars who spent their time breaking into places. During their daily work they would have thrills like this every

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

day. How much more fun it must be than slogging in an office! I made up my mind then and there that when I was grown up I would become a gentleman burglar.

My conscience, which was still quite troublesome, pointed out that stealing was wrong, and I thought it was a great pity; it seemed to be the only flaw in a really exciting career. Then an inspiration came to me. I would be the head of an Agency which discovered all dishonest dealings. I would only burgle rich swindlers and give my loot to the poor. I would be the twentieth-century Robin Hood.

A lot of valuable time had been wasted, and I only had a few minutes to find my papers. "More haste less speed"—frantically I searched through what seemed to be thousands of papers. There was my brother's prose paper and a paper belonging to one of the people who were keeping guard outside; I put them into my pocket. It was agreed beforehand that I would bring them if they kept guard. At last I found one of my own. I heard the warning signal outside that we must go now or be late for Chapel. I spent another ten seconds searching, but I could find no more, and taking a flying leap on to the window-sill I got through and shut the window, and left the stone inside. I hoped that nobody would suspect that anyone had been inside, and that they would think that someone had thrown the stone by accident. The next minute I was running "hell for leather" to Chapel, and arrived

AT ELON ON THE 4TH OF JUNE



FIRST LEAPS

panting through the door just as the bell gave its final peal. I learnt all the answers and got nearly full marks for my paper. I had the sense to make a few mistakes on purpose, and defeated the astonished examiners with flying colours.

II

SPANISH IBEX

WHEN I WAS still at Eton my father took me to the Pyrenees in the Easter holidays. We had gone up the winding road to Gavarnie and for several days had climbed about the mountains.

Years before my grandfather had found in the Val d'Arras the Pyrenean ibex, on the Spanish side close to Gavarnie. He had gone there to shoot, but though he spent over a month and the ibex were quite numerous, he had not been able to shoot one. My father, too, had tried, but by this time all Spanish shepherds possessed rifles and the ibex had become so scarce that he was afraid they would become extinct. So he wrote to the King of Spain, who on his advice made the valley his own private shoot to be looked after by keepers until the ibex were more numerous. Of course in the south of Spain the ibex are still fairly common, but they are not the same kind as the Pyrenean ibex. The horns of the Pyrenean variety, which lives in thick bush, turn in. The horns of the Spanish ibex of the south turn out.

One day we climbed the Brèche de Roland and looked down into the Val d'Arras. This was the last

SPANISH IBEX

remaining stronghold of the Pyrenean ibex. Here the steep cliffs and dense box-bushes had preserved them. As I looked down into the valley I made up my mind that one day I would go and hunt along its crags and cornices.

Later, in London, I paid a visit to the Natural History Museum to look at the specimens of the Spanish ibex and talked to Captain Dollman, the Director of the Mammal Department. I learned that the Museum would very much like to possess a skin, but as the valley, which used to be free shooting, was now preserved by His Majesty the King of Spain, they thought there was no likelihood of my being able to get one. But I was convinced that once among the thick woods and high rocks there would be very little chance of my being caught. I knew that if I could scrape together a few pounds to pay expenses Celestagne (the grandson of old Celestagne, who had hunted with my father) would come with me.

I thought of all my relations in turn, and wondered which one would be the most promising "touch" for a few pounds to pay for the trip. Obviously not my father, as he would be sure to think that I should be caught and that there would be a lot of fuss and fines to pay. Most of my other relations would frown on the escapade and think it sheer madness, and ask if I would never grow out of such ridiculous nonsense. There was one loophole, my grandmother, a woman of science, and I thought that funds might be raised

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

by the idea of collecting a skin for the Natural History Museum. So in my best handwriting I wrote to her and invited her to watch the final of the House Fours. I felt that if m'tutor's won, the chances would be good. It was a lovely warm sunny evening, and the whole of Eton had come to watch the final. Luck was with us and, not because of our good rowing but because of the bad steering of the other two crews, we won.

I led my grandmother up to my room. While the old lady was enjoying a good tea I brought the conversation round, *via* the Natural History Museum and their need for a skin, to an expedition to the Val d'Arras. There was a moment or two of suspense rather similar to that felt by a fisherman who watches his fly pass over a trout. Would he rise or would he not? The trout—or rather my grandmother—agreed to finance the trip.

This was my last term at Eton, and we both felt sad that my schooldays were over and that I would be going up to Cambridge in the autumn.

A few weeks later I was back at Gavarnie. The high snow mountains, in a semicircle formation, looked down upon us. The bleats of goats and sheep, the tinkling of bells and falling water echoed from crag to crag; choughs called, eagles and vultures soared in a cloudless sky, and in the stream by my feet the little Pyrenean trout rose in the rapid, swirling pools.

No one else was awake when Celestagne and myself,

M'TUTOR'S HOUSE FOUR AS WE WERE PADDLING
UP TO THE START



SPANISH IBEX

with two rucksacks and a rifle, stepped quietly out of the village. We did not want anyone to see us set out; we were afraid that the guides that went into Spain would later in the day pass on the news that Celestagne and I had gone off towards the Val d'Arras and had not returned.

We climbed up over the mountains. A capercaille flew out of some trees above our heads and a hare scampered across the mountainside, and farther up above the tree-line we saw an old buck chamois having his early morning feed before going off to sleep during the day in some shady spot.

At the Brèche de Roland we ate our breakfast. The Brèche was a gap in the cliff; legend had it that Roland, who died in the valley of Rencesvalles with Oliver, fighting the Moors, had passed that way and, feeling a bit fresh, had taken a crack at the cliff with his sword, and the Brèche de Roland, which is a few hundred feet high, was the result of his good spirits.

We wandered on, often stopping to drink out of the little streams that came tumbling down. We wished to get to the edge of the valley while the light was still good, so as to be able to spy the crags on the far side in the hopes of seeing an ibex.

It was a typical hot sunny day without a cloud in the sky. The cool mountain air made walking a joy. Over the watershed we met some shepherds. It is the custom in the Pyrenees to talk with anyone you see in the mountains, and we sat and handed round our wine-

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

skin. The shepherds held the skin with outstretched arms, removed the stopper, and squirted the wine into their mouths. I tried too, and found that once the art of swallowing without closing the mouth is learned it is a very pleasant way of drinking. After our wine-skin had been handed round they in turn handed theirs. It was a thick, heavy wine, and we only drank a little, remembering the difficult climb we had before us. They had lately come up from the valley, and told us that they had seen several big ram ibex in the rocks about the tree-line.

We said good-bye, and soon came to the edge of the valley and sat down to scan the high rocks and cornices on the far side. After a long spy we saw two big ram ibex. The sun was now just beginning to set, and we knew we must make our descent into the valley below before it became too dark.

Celestagne went first. The climb was not nearly so difficult as I had expected, and all that was really needed was a good head and a sure foot. It wasn't till we had reached the foot of the precipice that I first felt a pang of excitement. We were now in the King's preserved shoot, and knew that it was well kept by the Carabinéros who guarded the exits to the valley.

It was dark by the time we reached the little farm, which was also a small hotel kept by Ramond Viu. Ramond was expecting us, as I had written telling him I should be coming. Twenty years before, when my

THE VAL D'ARRAS IN THE PYRENEES

Photo by the Author



SPANISH IBEX

father had crossed back into France over the mountains, a blizzard had started; Ramond, who was acting as a guide and was used to the warmth of the south of Spain, had collapsed with the cold, and my father had carried him on his back for several hours till they reached Gavarnie, where Ramond was revived. We crossed the stream and hid the rifle in the box-bushes on the far side and returned to the hotel.

Ramond Viu was delighted to see us. He knew our secret, but the Carabinéros who were standing by only saw my camera and fishing-rod and suspected nothing. I told Ramond in front of them that I wished to spend a few days climbing in the valley, fishing and taking photographs.

The next morning was misty, and we feared we might easily find ourselves on some cornice and not be able to see a way down; so I took my rod and went to fish in the stream. It was a fast, rushing stream with deep, green pools. I wandered from pool to pool and had a most enjoyable day. The trout were not large, but were very quick and shy, and only by keeping very well concealed and using the finest of fine casts could I have any success at all.

Later the mist rolled away and some Spanish Carabinéros, with their rifles over their shoulders, came down the valley and watched me fishing for a few minutes while Celestagne spoke to them. I photographed them and showed them the fish I had caught and pointed to some mountains that I said I hoped to climb, and

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

they went on their way convinced that I was merely a tourist and was not likely to be after the ibex. We felt a little nervous. Supposing we met them when we had the rifle? They were good mountaineers and looked very fit and strong; perhaps they would catch us and I would spend many weeks in a Spanish prison! I wondered if they shouted to us to stop and we didn't whether they would fire at us?

That evening the mist blew away, and once again the sun shone out of a blue sky. The high, rocky crags, sheer precipices, and lower bush-covered slopes made an awe-inspiring spectacle.

Early next morning we set out again with the rod, and after fishing I slipped into the bush and changed my flannels for some old rough clothes. We took the rifle from its hiding-place under the rock and climbed up through the box scrub towards the high crags, where we had seen the ibex two days before. There were tracks everywhere, and round patches among the dry leaves where they had slept. Several times we heard them running away ahead of us, but though we tip-toed along through the tracks we never so much as caught a glimpse of one.

After following many ibex paths we realised their technique. The moment they suspect any danger they circle round and stand watching their tracks. All we ever heard was a few stones that rolled down the slopes and the breaking of branches as the ibex cantered away.

SPANISH IBEX

For the next week we wandered through the bush and scanned the bare crags, but never saw anything but very small rams and females. We always returned to the hotel in the evenings without the rifle. One day we saw a young ram on a ledge, and knowing that there was only one way down and that he would have to run past us to reach it, I gave Celestagne the rifle and took my camera, hoping to get a photograph. The ledge he was on was barely forty yards wide and covered with low-growing rhododendrons the height of our knees. We saw the ibex feed round behind the rocks and we cautiously tip-toed up to it, but when we looked round it had vanished. I walked on to the end of the cornice, where it finished in sheer precipice, and then realised that the ibex had squatted like a hare and that we had walked right past him. The dense box-bushes growing everywhere except on the precipices themselves made it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. Here and there avalanches in the spring had fallen, cutting paths through the bush. Sometimes we sat in the early morning or in the evening by one of these paths, hoping a big ram would wander across; but we never had any luck, and I began to fear that my money would run out and that I should have to return without an ibex.

After the first half-hour every morning, during which time we expected to see a keeper behind every bush, all fear of being caught left us. Every morning it was exactly the same when we started out. Celestagne,

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

who was the same age as myself, was very keen to get an ibex so that he would be known as a great hunter, like his father and grandfather, whose names were written on the door of the hotel.

Undoubtedly the best way to get an ibex was to stay by one of the paths cut by an avalanche and wait for the ibex to cross, but we were both too impatient, and after twenty minutes or so we always walked on into the bush.

While we were watching the paths I used to think what I would do in years to come. Of course, in the autumn I was going to Cambridge, where I would get a Blue, and after Cambridge I would get a job in the Sudan Civil Service! I pictured myself in a very few years as being Governor of the Sudan. I thought of all the improvements I would make in the Sudan itself. I had my policy mapped out. I would always be firm and just, and would be loved by the Sudanese. Often bad men would try to shoot me, but always some faithful boy would throw himself between me and the assassin. How I enjoyed these ramblings into the future! Before long Celestagne would always nudge me and say, "Let's go along here and look down on to the cornices below."

As we returned home one afternoon an ibex galloped off in front, and seeing by his tracks that he was a big one, we decided to wait half an hour or so, until the ibex had forgotten his fright and was once more feeding peacefully, and then follow the spoor. We climbed

SPANISH IBEX

up a little and turned back a short way along his tracks.

We sat down on the edge of a little cliff barely twenty feet high. If we had gone a very few yards farther we should have seen the tracks of the big ibex, for he had circled round and was now at the foot of the cliff on which we sat. He must have been squatting within fifteen yards of us, just out of sight.

We ate some food we had brought with us, and I watched an almost jet black squirrel collecting nuts for the winter. At last the ibex could stand it no longer, and with his horns lying along his back and his nose pointing up before him, he galloped off into the bush. I threw my rifle to my shoulder as if it were a shot-gun and took a snapshot as he disappeared into the trees. The report was deafening, and the excitement of seeing the ibex roll over was soon overwhelmed by fear of the consequences.

We were within half a mile of the hotel, and we saw the Carabinéros run out and start searching the bush with their telescopes. We lay like logs, not daring to move, and finally they went back into the hotel. My good friend Ramond tried to calm the excited Spaniards and told them that what they had heard was a rock falling from a cliff and not the report of a rifle. He stood them large quantities of wine, which I afterwards had to pay for, and quietened them down sufficiently to persuade them to return home and to come

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early in the morning and interview me if they wished.

We skinned the ibex and hung the meat on a tree. After seeing the Carabinéros leave the hotel we climbed down and knocked at Ramond's door. Ramond let us in and told us that we must leave at six, as they were returning at seven and he thought they would arrest me. So telling him where the meat was cached and setting my alarm, we ate some dinner and went to bed.

At five o'clock, when it was still pitch dark, the alarm bell went off under my pillow. We had slept in our clothes, and after drinking some coffee out of a thermos, we slipped out of the window, picked up the skin, horns, and rifle, which we had hidden near the hotel, and made our way through the trees to the foot of the precipice. It was too dark to make the ascent now, and we had to wait. At about five-thirty we saw lights round the hotel, and shortly afterwards a great deal of shouting. The Carabinéros had returned an hour and a half earlier than they said they would and had found that we had gone. I was thankful that I had decided to take no risks and had started early. Light was now growing fast, as we started to climb the cliff, and on reaching the top we looked down through our glasses and saw the Carabinéros watching us through a telescope. After holding up the ibex head in full view we waved our hands and disappeared over the top. Before midday we had crossed the border into France,

MY SPANISH IBEX IN THE PYRENEES

Photo by the Author



SPANISH IBEX

and that evening Celestagne and I had a champagne dinner in the inn at Gavarnie to celebrate the success of our trip.

I returned to England, and before going up to Cambridge in the autumn presented the South Kensington Museum with the skin.

III

CLIMBING THE SPIRES

THE GRANTA TRICKLED down between the Backs, where for centuries the old grey colleges of Cambridge have stood among some of the best-kept lawns in England. No modern lawns, however well kept, look quite the same as these.

My room in St. John's College looked out over the Backs by the Bridge of Sighs. I had spent many hours sitting on my window-sill, with a history book on my knees, thinking of anything but history and watching the shoals of dace swim up and down the river.

A rod stuck out of the window, with the finest of fine casts and a small dry-fly. Every now and then when a shoal came close, I'd put down my book and cast a fly in front of them. Behind me on the table was a big glass tank in which nearly a dozen swam to and fro. After they were caught, they soon became tame. I used to keep them for a few days, mark them, and return them to the river.

All fishermen know that if a fish is dropped into the water, the bladder of air inside by which it balances bursts, and the fish, unable to keep itself on an even keel, dies. Usually I used to carry the tank down to

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the Backs and let the dace swim quietly away, but to-day I thought it would be more amusing to make little parachutes and let the fish down gently. A big envelope looked the ideal thing. Taking one of the smaller fish from the tank, I put it inside and dropped it out of the window. For some reason or other, when the envelope fell on the water—which it did quite gently—the fish did not kick and get out of it, as I had expected, but lay floating on the surface, and I was afraid that without speedy assistance it would die.

Up the Backs came an old Don with his family in a punt. He was making very hard work poling up the river, and I shouted to him:

“Please, sir, will you give that envelope a poke?”

Now the Don was advanced in years and a little hard of hearing. However, he heard the word “envelope,” and seeing it float on the water, thought I wanted it rescued.

“Certainly,” he said; “I’ll get it for you,” and turning his punt round, he picked the envelope out of the water. His family watched with great interest, and were obviously proud of the skilful manner in which he handled the boat. The fish felt the envelope being picked up, and gave a kick and slipped out, and splashed into the river.

“Good God,” said the Don, “there was a fish in it! However did it get inside?”

“I put it there,” I said.

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"Do you often put fish into envelopes?" said he, obviously thinking he was talking to a lunatic.

"Yes, quite often," I replied. "Thank you very much, sir."

There was a laugh, and behind me stood my friend Tim, who had come round to discuss the final plans of our climbing the spire of King's College.

Tim was a quiet, unassuming sort of person, who did not excel at any games or sport. His one real joy was climbing. I have never met anyone with such a cool head or such a perfect balance on a narrow ledge. I had first met Tim on a roof, and since then we had always climbed together. He had a neat coil of Alpine rope under his arm.

"There is a lovely new rope," he said; "if we don't get to the top to-night we never shall. The moon is full and the roofs are bone dry, and there is no wind to unbalance us in difficult places."

It was indeed a lovely new rope, soft and pliable, and just long enough to rope us at the one place where last week we had found the stones unsafe. It was within a few feet of the top of the spires, where the mouldings were the only handhold, and most of these were rotten; but by spreading one's weight over as many as possible we ought to reach the top. Without a rope the climb would be sheer madness, as there was a two-hundred-foot drop, but with a rope if the ornaments broke the climber would merely fall some thirty feet, and at the worst stun himself against the walls of the

CLIMBING THE SPIRES

chapel. At no other part of the climb was there any serious risk of falling, provided that every movement was made with the greatest care.

“Yes, that ought to do the trick,” I said, “if anything will. As you live out of College, you’ll have to be in by twelve, so if we start at about quarter-past eleven we shall just have time to do the job. Come up to my rooms after Hall, then you can leave College through the gate, as though you were going back to your digs, and I shall have to climb out over the kitchens.” We were not allowed to leave College after 10 p.m.

It was a brilliant moonlit night, without a cloud in the sky. Most of the undergraduates had gone to bed, but here and there we could see lights in the windows, which showed where some hard-working young man was burning midnight oil.

I slipped on my gym shoes, coiled the rope round my waist under my gown, and slipped from between the bars which were supposed to prevent undergraduates from leaving the College. This exit was well known to the porters and the tutors.

The Head Porter, who was a captain in the Great War, was a perfect man for his job. He was the height of discretion himself, provided nothing really bad was going on. He never saw anything that it would be better for the Head Porter not to see, and for this he was greatly respected by all the undergraduates. Officially he was convinced that it was impossible for

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anyone to enter or leave the College except by ringing the bell at the Porter's Lodge, but unofficially he was anything but a fool and knew just what was happening. Once, when we had been climbing back from Trinity, the Trinity porters had seen us and had telephoned to the porters at John's and said that some undergraduates were climbing down from Trinity to John's. The Head Porter guessed exactly who it was. He knew that we never did any damage and he didn't see why we should not enjoy ourselves climbing about the roofs; however, he could do nothing else but send one of the porters to catch us. It was extremely lucky for us that the porter who was waiting for us should have a terrible fit of sneezing and coughing just before we came over the balustrades of Trinity Chapel. After another quarter of an hour he returned to the porter's Lodge, and having rung up the Trinity porters and told them that they were quite mistaken, and that no one had come down, he resumed reading his evening paper.

It was much less trouble to have an easy way in and out of the College, where young gentlemen who had dined too well would not hurt themselves trying to get in. Once in the kitchen passage one merely had to climb over the gate. Rumour had it that one of the authorities, who in his own young days had been among the best climbers in Cambridge and afterwards an Antarctic explorer, had arranged the spikes which were supposed to prevent the exit of undergraduates

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in such a way as to provide handholds and footholds which did not in any way impede the climber.

I paused for a moment or two at the post on top of the gate. I could see Tim standing in the road. He made a sign not to come down, and I drew myself behind a pillar. Down the street walked a Proctor and the Bulldogs. Tim very politely touched his cap, the Proctor did the same, and the ridiculous procession marched on down the streets. As they turned the corner, I dropped down from the gate. We hurried down King's Parade, passed Trinity and Caius, whose pinnacles and shadows thrilled us with their beauty. In a few minutes we were climbing the palings guarding the King's College Chapel.

This was probably much the most difficult part of the whole climb, as it is in full view of the King's Parade, and though it looks easy enough it is difficult to get over quickly. It would be very awkward if one were seen and the powers at King's rang up the Porter's Lodge. For by the time they arrived we should be half-way up to the roof of the chapel and would have been caught like rats in a trap.

No one saw us, however, and we were soon in the shade of the pillars. We threw off our caps and gowns, poked the ends of our grey flannel trousers into our socks, and soon we were going up one behind the other with our backs against the wall of the chapel and our feet against the ledge. There was a lightning conductor, but it was quite unnecessary to use it. It is not

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at all amusing climbing up with a wire between one's hands, and one's face to the wall. Nine-tenths of the fun of moonlight roof-climbing is to watch the ever-growing view as one climbs higher and higher. We felt perfectly safe wedged between back and legs, while the lightning conductor wire might have given way. If the climber used the wire it would overstrain the bolts that fastened it to the masonry, and he would anyhow be doing a certain amount of damage; this was forbidden by the rules of our club. We felt that no one could object to us climbing the spires of Cambridge and admiring the view from the top, but only if we did no damage of any kind.

In less than two minutes we were on the roof of the chapel. The pigeons who roost there had heard us scrambling up the outside, and flew out in hundreds. Surely this would attract the attention of the porters. We ran across the roof and looked down towards the Porter's Lodge; but no, those worthy servants of the College had not thought it unusual that the pigeons should fly round in the middle of the night!

Tim was the lighter of the two and the better climber, and he was to tie the umbrella on the lightning conductor at the top of the spire. In the Alps people build cairns on tops of mountains. At Oxford they think it amusing to put bedroom utensils to mark the summit of their climbs. We had never before left anything to mark our ramblings on the roofs at night—we simply climbed for the joy of

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climbing and had no wish to boast of our achievements. But lately our friends had annoyed us by frankly disbelieving that we had even got to the roof of King's, let alone reached the pinnacles.

With the rope I climbed up inside the pinnacle, taking great care to avoid touching the bells, as one clang would put us in a very awkward position indeed. I poked the rope out through a grating and tied it on to a beam inside. Now I felt it jerking as Tim tied it round his waist. As he went up, I pulled in the slack, so that if he fell, he would not have more than a foot or two's drop. Now he was opposite me, and a hand came through the grating. I grabbed it, and whispered "Good Luck" as he passed. On and on he went, and up and up as I payed out the rope. He was now trusting to the decorations. The anxiety of waiting in the tower was awful. Supposing he fell and was hanging unconscious at the end of the rope? I could do nothing, because, even if I could have pulled him up, he could not have got through the hole from which the rope had been poked out. I could climb up to him, but it would be absolutely impossible to get safely down, as it was all one could do to hang on one's self using both hands, and there would be nothing to hold him with. Oh, fools that we were! Why didn't we think of all this before and bring three people?

I could hear his stealthy movements as he climbed up. Every now and then he paused to test the ornaments. Tim was by far the best climber in Cambridge,

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and I doubt if there is a better cat-burglar living. Now there was silence, and I knew he had reached the top. There was a little scraping noise as he tied the umbrella to the conductor. I heard a little chuckle of success, and the rope began to get loose in my hands. Foot by foot I drew it in; now he was at the critical place; the stone held; once again he was opposite the hole. The whispered words came through the bars: "It's done." A few moments later the rope jerked. This was the signal that he had untied it from his waist, and I pulled it through the hole. It was the work of a few moments to undo the rope from the beam, and Tim and I were lying on our backs on the roof, wiping the perspiration from our foreheads. I had sweated with fear that he would fall, and he with the exercise of his climb. The umbrella looked fine to us against the sky. We admired our handiwork, and hid the rope on the roof, for we intended to return the next night and take the umbrella down. We did not mean the authorities at King's to have to pay people to do this when we ourselves enjoyed doing it for nothing! It was seven minutes to twelve, and Tim ran to get to his lodgings before midnight.

I sauntered down the street, climbed up onto the kitchen gate, and stood for a moment or two looking up at Trinity Chapel. Something moved on the roof, and I realised that there were other people climbing that night. I recognised the figure of Jim Moore.

Jim had come up a year before from Shrewsbury

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with a great reputation as an oarsman. He had rowed five in a trial eight, and was hailed by everyone as one of the most promising heavyweights they had ever seen, but Jim had slightly overgrown his strength and his heart was not quite as sound as it should have been, so his doctor had ordered him a year's rest. As a climber he was very good. Being very tall he was able to reach ledges, handholds, and places which would be quite impossible for smaller men. He was an amazingly efficient person. I remembered I had such complete confidence in him that a day or two before, when I was going over a parapet with a hundred-foot drop below, I never even looked at the knot Jim had tied. There could be no doubt that if Jim tied a knot it would not come undone. I waited for him to climb down with his back towards me. I touched him on the shoulder and said in a voice like that of the Head Porter:

"Now then, Mr. Moore, I shall have to report you to the Dean."

With a start, Jim turned round, and seeing me burst out laughing.

"My word," he said, "You gave me a start. Have you seen King's Chapel? Someone has put an umbrella on the pinnacle. It had only just been done, for when we first climbed up on to Trinity roofs it wasn't there. Next time we looked, it had opened out. Clive and I have just come back to get another umbrella. We are going to put one on the other spire

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to match it. Was it you, you devil, who put it up?" said Jim.

"Well, I helped," I said. "Tim actually did it."

"Well, come on back with us now, and we'll do the other one."

The next moment Clive came down and stood beside Jim. Clive, whose surname was Woolley, was not nearly such a good climber as Jim. He loved climbing for the sensation of fear that he got by being in places in which he knew that if he let go or missed his footing it would be the end. I have often stood and watched him in a difficult place. I think without doubt he was very frightened indeed, and as soon as the difficult place had been passed he would chuckle and smile and enjoy the relief of being in a safe place. Once, on a former occasion, his agonised expression almost made me laugh, but I had to stifle it back, as if I had burst out laughing it might easily have taken his attention from what he was doing and resulted in a fall.

Clive was also an oarsman, but though he expended a tremendous amount of energy and was overflowing with guts and stamina, he was not a clever waterman. Doubtless if he had learned to row as a boy at school he would have been really first class.

"We must get hold of another umbrella." But none of us had one. Slipping through the bars into Second Court, we found one in the first room we came to.

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“We shall need a rope,” said Jim. “I had better go and get mine.”

“No, we won’t,” I said. “We have left ours hidden on the roof.”

In a few moments we were again clambering over the railings and were soon on the roof of the Chapel. It was then that I remembered that we had not brought any string to tie on the umbrella, but after looking round for a bit, we found a piece of wire. Jim and Clive were both much better climbers, but also much larger than I. We knew how rotten the stone was, and we all agreed at once that the lightest person should do the last few feet, because we did not wish to damage the stonework in any way.

Jim went up inside the tower and I saw the rope dangling out through the hole. I climbed up, and the next moment it was round my waist. Up and up I went; if only the stone had been good, how I would have enjoyed this climb! I tested every handhold first, but though it bore my weight, I could feel that the stone was rotten. I spread myself out as much as I could, and tried to cling on with hands, feet, knees, and chin all at once. It was slow going, but at last I was over the difficult place. A few more steps and I held the lightning conductor in my hand. Never shall I forget that moment as I looked round on the sloping roofs of Cambridge far below me. There was a brilliant full moon, and as I stood there, putting up the umbrella and getting the wire out of my pocket, two

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wild ducks flew past, and I listened to the magic whistling of their wings as they disappeared down the Backs.

The umbrella was in position; I stood some minutes admiring the view and experiencing a strange thrill of achievement which I had never felt before.

Why I climbed I don't really know myself. I think I was the only one who really appreciated the view of the college roofs and pinnacles at night, and certainly the sensation of climbing up was very delightful, but how I loathed coming down! I didn't want to start down. I wanted to get a really good impression of the roofs of all the colleges, the shining water of the Backs, and the thrill of being on probably the highest pinnacle in Cambridge.

I knew that moments like this one could not experience every day; in fact, perhaps never again. I knew that often in years to come I should think of this climb, and how annoyed I should be if I couldn't bring back the feel of the cool stone under my hands, the feel of the lightning conductor gripped between my knees for extra security. I looked down and saw the roof of King's far below me. From the ground the pinnacles don't look very much higher than the roof itself at night, but from the pinnacles the roof of the Chapel looks almost level with the ground itself. For a moment I forgot I was roped and I wondered what would happen if I lost my head and let go? I twisted round the conductor and looked down on the

UMBRELLAS ON KING'S CHAPEL

THE EFFORT TO SHOOT DOWN ONE ON THE LEFT
HAS BEEN PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL



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ground on the far side. I had heard people say that when looking down from a great height they have a wish to let go and throw themselves off, but never had I such a strong desire to hold on and stay where I was.

I wondered what eventually would be my end? I very much hoped that it would not be in bed after a long illness; but as there were so many places I wanted to visit in the world and so many things that I wanted to do, I couldn't bear to think of dying before I was seventy or eighty, and by that time I couldn't imagine that I should have the luck to have the sudden death of falling off a Chapel roof, as by that time I should probably not be able to climb at all.

I wondered what life had in store for me—whether I would be a success or a failure. For a moment or two I felt this was symbolical, and that I should be as successful in climbing over my fellow beings as I had been in climbing over the Chapel; then I laughed at myself, at my own conceit and stupidity. I had never realised it before, but I suppose I was conceited. I wondered if it was a handicap if a person was conceited, but came to the conclusion that it didn't matter how good an opinion one had of oneself so long as one didn't show it. If one didn't think well of oneself, it was quite certain that no one else would. A gentle tug on the rope brought me back to earth (fortunately not in a literal sense), and looking down I noticed the stone looked better a little to one side of me, and I started the descent a few feet to the right.

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I was coming to the difficult place again, and a big piece of stone came loose in my hands. I held on to it for grim life, for it might have hit Clive on the head. He was somewhere below me. I climbed up again. What a wonder Jim was! He knew exactly what was happening, and was paying out rope so that at no time did I feel a jerk. I moved across a few feet to the left, and came down the same way as I had gone up. Now I was on the beastly rotten stone again. I could feel it soft and crumbling under my fingers, but it bore my weight. The next moment I was in safety. I stopped to rest a moment and let my heart, which felt as if it was going at a thousand beats to the minute, quieten down. In a little ledge just by my hand I saw something round, and picking it up, found that it was an old tuppenny-piece. This had evidently been left in days gone by, by a former climber. I often wonder whether he had reached the top or whether he had been a heavy man who knew that the ornaments would not bear his weight, and so had gone no farther.

I untied the rope, and saw it slithering through the hole, and whispering "It's O.K." to Jim, I climbed down on to the roof of the Chapel.

We all three wiped the perspiration from our hands, for we must not slip on the way down. We looked up at the two umbrellas at the tops of the pinnacles.

"I wonder if anyone will mind umbrellas being on a chapel?" said Clive.

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The last thing I should like to think I had done was to help to hurt someone's feelings, but I don't think that anyone could mind just an umbrella. We walked along the roof and looked down into King's Parade. The whole place was deserted. We peered into the shadows round about the pillars of the chapels in case one of the King's porters had seen us and had come to catch us. We crossed the chapel and looked at the Porter's Lodge. Nothing stirred, and it was obvious that no one had seen us or had yet noticed the umbrellas. A few minutes later we were on the ground, had climbed the railings, and were walking back to College.

Jim had the rope over his shoulder. He had thought it stupid to leave it on the roof, as it might be found by the authorities, who knowing that we should return for it, might wait to catch us. A policeman came out from the shade of a doorway.

"What are you doing?"

"Just going for a walk," we said. "What are you doing, for that matter?"

"Young men don't go for walks at one o'clock in the morning with a climbing rope for nothing. I must take you to the police station as suspected persons."

"Now, look here, Robert, you know perfectly well we have not done anything wrong. We just climb about. We can't possibly come to the police station, because we should be caught by not being in our rooms in the morning, and get sent down."

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“Well, I wouldn’t like that to happen,” said the Robert, “but I shall get into awful trouble if any damage has been done or anything stolen if I let suspected persons go without detaining them. I should lose my job.”

“Well, look here, Robert, we will give you our names and the right names too! We know we haven’t done anything, bar tying some umbrellas on to a roof, which only concerns the University authorities and not the Police. Will you promise that if no other damage has been done you won’t mention it to anyone?”

“That will be all right,” said the Robert; “I like a prank myself, and if it’s nothing worse than that, you needn’t have any fears from me.”

So we gave him our names, and saying good-night, climbed over the gates into John’s.

IV

A CAVALRY PARADE

MY ALARM CLOCK woke me the next morning. Sleepily I stretched out my hand and tried to stop the infernal buzzing. Nowhere could I find the catch. Finally in despair I flung the clock against the wall. There was a tinkling of broken glass. It was the end of a good clock. Everything stopped except the buzzing which went on to its dreary end. I couldn't think why I had set it, and then remembered that there was a cavalry parade. My hands were still black from last night's climbs, as I had been too tired to wash before going to bed. I had joined the cavalry, as this was the cheapest way of riding. One could ride every week before breakfast for a couple of pounds a term. I dressed quickly and ran on down to the riding school. As usual, I was the last to arrive. All the best horses had been taken and there was only one brute with a mouth like iron left.

Very soon we were trotting down the streets on the way to the parade ground. The umbrellas looked magnificent and caused a lot of speculation. Who had done it? Like Brer rabbit I kept quiet and said nothing.

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A general of some sort had come down to inspect the cavalry. I knew very little about drill, but by watching the person next to me I managed to get through most of the exercises without making myself conspicuous. We mounted and dismounted, charged sacks hanging on poles with a drawn sword, and made unsuccessful attempts at sticking pegs. The parade was to finish with a charge up the field. We lined up and started to trot; we carried our swords on our shoulders and were supposed to salute when we reached the general.

I could just hold my horse when I had two hands to the reins, but with one hand holding a sword, try as I would I could not keep him back, and gradually I drew ahead. My horse would not be satisfied until he was a length ahead of the rest. I was riding just behind a sergeant who broke into a canter and then turning round and swinging back his sword gave the order to gallop. Alas, I was just too close, and the point of his sword caught my horse on the nose. Away I went like a Derby winner, leaving the others far behind. There was a kind of a blur as I passed the general. People began to shout and told me to stop. I believe it is a treasonable offence in the Army to throw away one's arms, but I thought the sooner I got rid of my sword the better. I flung it to one side, and out of the corner of my eye saw the point bury itself in the ground. The handle snapped off. Before me there was a big hedge, the other side a tarmac road.

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I prayed my horse would not try to jump. I tugged the left rein, he turned, stumbled badly and righted himself.

There were more shouts as I re-passed the general; if anything his face had grown a shade redder and he repeated his order to stop. In front of me was a long line of charging troops. Somehow I managed to go through the middle without hitting anyone. Someone cheered and I answered whoopee. Now I was really enjoying myself as I was no longer frightened. I was fairly certain that my horse would not try to jump anything. I gave him his head and dug my heels into his ribs. Again we circled the field and I passed close enough to the general to make his horse run backwards. I had great hopes that it would join in too, but it had no sporting instincts whatsoever. There was a line of mounted troops watching the fun and enjoying it almost as much as I was myself. Cavalry horses are not unlike cab horses. They like standing in rows, and at last my horse, feeling that it wanted to stop, pulled up at the end of the line.

V

WILD GEESE

IT WAS THE last week-end before the Cambridge crew were going to practice at Henley, and I did so long to have one more try for the geese. The moon and the tide were right at the moment, and whether I got one or not I knew that I should be sure to see them. After Hall, Peter and I went to our rooms, untidied our beds, washed and left the dirty water in the wash basins, and wrote a note for our bedmakers that we should be out to breakfast. We then slipped out of College.

Peter, who is the son of Captain Scott who died on his way back from the South Pole, was already becoming a really good wild-fowler and had started painting his pictures of wild geese, which are now so famous and appear year after year in the Royal Academy.

We had borrowed a fast car, and it was soon eating up the miles on its way to the Wash. The moon did not rise until midnight, and as there was no desperate hurry we chose the way through Newmarket. Our car had a sunlight roof, and when we were through the town we turned out the lights and put on the spotlight, for we did not want anybody to take our number.



Photo by the Author

PETER SCOTT WITH OUR BAG OF WILD GEESSE

WILD GEESE

We purred over the heath. The rabbits continually crossed the road in front of the car. We had only two rules: one, that we never shot at a rabbit unless we were going at forty miles an hour; and the other, that we gave all the rabbits we got to poor people. It is easy enough to shoot rabbits from a car going slowly. Most of them are not afraid of cars and flop along by the side of the road; but when you go at forty miles an hour, it is the most sporting shot I know. We thought that we were doing very well when we killed one in three shots. As for the legal side of it, while the rabbits are actually crossing the road they are public property, and the only law that we were breaking was using a firearm within twenty-five yards of the King's highway.

We were luckier than usual that night, and by the time we had left the heath country behind us, we had eight rabbits in the back of the car. We drove through King's Lynn and down through low potato fields to the salt marshes of the Wash.

We left the car near the sea wall and ran up to the top of the bank to listen to the geese. We could hear the distant roar of the tide, the whistling of a flock of wigeons as they flew over the salting, and far away to the west the distant clamouring of a big gaggle of geese. The moon would not rise for another hour, and the geese would not flight for some time after that.

With some lumps of coal that I had brought from

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my scuttle, a few bundles of wood, and a couple of firelighters, there was soon a cheerful little blaze behind the car. Out came a frying-pan, sausages and bacon, and a big thermos full of coffee. A pale light appeared over the marsh and the waning moon climbed into the heavens. It was now almost low tide, and we knew that the creeks would be muddy; so pulling on thigh boots and an extra thick sweater, we buckled our cartridge belts round our waists and walked out over the marsh.

We heard the distant clamouring of the geese out on the mud, smelt the salt sea smell of the marsh, and felt the long grass swishing against our boots as we walked out over the salting. This part of the marsh was only covered by the highest tides. Farther out, across the pale green grass which was dotted with little pools of water, we could hear the wigeon feeding. Now and again a startled curlew disappeared calling into the darkness. The salting gave way to the soft, sticky mud of the Wash.

We headed for a big creek to the west, and arrived in a few minutes. Down between its sheltering walls we slithered and slipped. A few inches of water were running out, draining the marsh, and as we walked with the current, our boots no longer squelched in the sticky mud. The geese had been silent for some time now, and we stopped to listen and make sure exactly where they were. For quite twenty minutes we listened to the sounds of the night before we heard a

BARNACLE GEESE FLYING OUT TO SEA

Photo by the Author



WILD GEESE

solitary "unk wonk," followed by a murmur rather like the buzz of a hive. They were in a straight line between us and the Lynn Channel lights; so with the greatest caution we went on.

The creek divided in front of us. We halted again to listen, and almost immediately we heard an old gander call straight in front of us. We decided to separate, and tossed for sides; I took the right. We agreed to walk two hundred paces, when Peter would whistle like a red-shank and I would call back like a goose. The moon was rising high in the sky, and was shining down above the faint mist which hung over the marshes. Soon the geese would begin to flight. I counted my paces and stopped, then answered Peter's call, which came softly across to me. Somewhere just in front, very, very close indeed, the geese answered, and I knew we would both be bound to get a shot when they flighted in to feed.

I chose a spot where the ground was hard and sandy. Nothing is more fatal than to have one's foot stuck firm in the mud and to be unable to swing to the left or right. There were a few mussel banks behind me, and with these as a background, I raised my head. I could just make out a black line of geese sitting on the mud. There was nothing to do but wait. I had got rather hot walking out, and now the cold frosty air made me shiver. It grew colder and colder. At any moment the geese must fly; the moon was now right up and the calls of the geese grew more frequent; they

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were clearly waking up and feeling hungry. A little flock of half a dozen got up and flew inland straight over Peter. I saw two flashes and almost instantaneously heard two reports. With a roar the whole flock were up, and came straight over me in a solid mass. So close were they that the nearest one was not more than two or three yards over my head. Never before had I had geese too close—I had to wait until they had passed me. They were silhouetted against some white clouds and flying straight away, the easiest of easy shots. Bang! Bang! The geese flew on, badly frightened but otherwise unhurt.

I met Peter again where the creek divided and saw two plump geese over his shoulder.

“I suppose they passed too far to the outside of you?” he said. “Yes,” I lied, and we plodded back to the car, both knowing perfectly well that they had gone straight over my head. This was my last day before we went into training, and six weeks of strenuous practice lay before the Boat Race.

Peter and I agreed that as soon as it was over we would go up the Solway and try to photograph geese.

VI

AN ASYLUM

PRACTICE CONTINUED AND I got my Blue. The day before we went away to Henley to finish our practice, George, who was rowing four, asked me:

"Have you ever been to an asylum, David?"

"No," I said.

"Well, come with us. All the medical people are going round the Fulborn Asylum; if you say you are a medical student no one will know, and I believe it is very interesting."

There was a 'bus waiting, and George and I jumped in with a crowd of others. At Fulborn we were taken into a lecture room and some brain specialist began to lecture on mental diseases. The "and's" and the "the's" were the only words that I could recognise, and I began to wish I hadn't gone.

"Now I will show you one or two cases," said the lecturer. "Bring in number 37."

In came No. 37, a woman of about fifty or so. At first she was very nervous of us, but the lecturer told her not to be afraid and to sit down. He explained that we had come to help her.

"Just tell them all about it," he said.

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“Well, when I first came here my hair was like silk and my skin like driven snow; you see, I was a beautiful Royal Queen, come down from Heaven, but all my enemies got at me. He is one.” She pointed at the lecturer. “And they keep me here against my will; I know it is only a hospital and soon I shall be going away, but it seems an awful long time. At one time I thought I was going mad, but I am absolutely sane and have been certified sane by the doctors.” She stopped talking and the lecturer said, “Oh yes, but what about the baby?”

At this she blushed and said, “Well, I will tell you as you are my friends and have come to help me. I had a baby. The Prince of Wales was its father, but he had not done the right thing by me, and so I prayed for it to be black, and it was black.”

The lecturer thanked her very much and said we would do our best to help her, and she was led out of the room by a warder. There was a scuffling outside and a moment later she ran back, beaming: “I am not married, you know, and I could marry any of you if you like.” By this time a warder had her by the arm and she was led, resisting strongly, out of the room.

The lecturer told us that this was a case which might easily get better. There was no mental disease and her present state was caused by idle gossipers in the village. Apparently there had been cause for scandal, and most of the women in the village, including the parson’s wife, who was the worst of the

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lot, had made this poor woman's life unbearable. The parson's wife regarded herself as a good woman. She was a regular churchgoer, in fact she never missed a service, but she had completely missed Christ's teaching. She had no mercy or kindness for this poor unmarried woman who had had a baby. She persuaded all the other narrow-minded people in the village either to completely ignore or to be rude to her with this result.

We were taken round the asylum and saw a number of cases. One old man had a beard. A year or two before he had started cutting out all the photographs of the Duc d'Orléans. A week later he refused to shave, and trimmed his beard until it was the same shape and size as the beard in the photograph. Then, with a beam on his face, he said: "There you see, I am the Duc d'Orléans—there is my photograph."

Like all people who come to an asylum for the first time, and like most young doctors, I was convinced that I could cure most of the patients by simply talking to them. But the doctor told us that when he first worked in an asylum he spent weeks and weeks talking and arguing with the loonies and though they usually followed the argument quite sensibly, in the end they always turned back to their original feelings. I heard one undergraduate asking that if in the well-known story of the man who thought he was a poached egg, and who was always looking for a piece of toast to sit on, could he not be given a huge piece

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of toast. Might not that make him sane? The doctor told us that this would undoubtedly make him very happy but that he would probably merely continue to sit on it.

All the lunies seemed happy and content with their lot, and I only saw one sight which made me feel rather sad. A very attractive girl of about eighteen was sitting up in bed; she was a real picture of loveliness except for her eyes, which were expressionless and vacant. On her bed sat her mother, who had come to visit her. It was apparently rather a rare case, and the bed was surrounded by students before anyone realised that it was the girl's mother and not a nurse. As the crowd opened out to let the mother walk away I heard her sobbing at the thought that all these young men should come to stare at her daughter as if she were a freak at a show or an animal in the Zoo.

We were shown a padded cell, and one old lady who was a homicidal maniac and who growled continuously like the purring of a cat. We passed through long rooms where there were rows and rows of patients suffering from G.P.I. (general paralysis of the insane). Just living corpses that could neither move nor reason. Absolutely impossible to cure, merely lying there, waiting till their hearts would cease beating before they could be put under the sod.

At last we came out into the fresh air. The sun was shining. I was very impressed with what I had seen,

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and I think if everybody visited an asylum once in their lives public opinion would soon change and incurable cases would be given overdoses of morphia. Perhaps in a few hundred years' time, people will look back on the cruel twentieth century when incurables were allowed to linger on till death brought a natural ending.

George and I returned to Cambridge to pack our things for Putney. There would only be two more weeks of practice before the Boat Race.

VII

THE BOAT RACE

I WOKE UP feeling that something was the matter. Perhaps it was Sunday? Yet I knew it was not. For a moment or two I could not think what it was. Then I realised that the day had come. It was the Boat Race day, and this afternoon sixteen poor devils—and I among them—would pant and sweat and make sport for the populace. Well, this would definitely be the last race that I should ever row. I remembered so many times before having made this excellent resolution.

The morning dragged on; we all tried to be cheerful and look unconcerned. Some people skimmed through the papers and read out what were thought to be foolish remarks made by old Blues writing to the press. Others, which mentioned Oxford as being better than ourselves, were read out in a tone of voice which was meant to imply how even more stupid they were!

We had early lunch at eleven o'clock. The authorities thought it was a bad thing to row on a full stomach, but it is certainly worse to row on an empty one. We ate sparingly and drank little. Then, putting on our pale blue caps, which thank goodness we should be wearing for the last time, we walked off



PUTNEY, 1932

THE BOAT RACE

down to the boat-house. Usually, we came down in a car, but now we wanted to kill time and it took longer to walk.

The usual Boat Race crowd was already beginning to collect. There were men with ridiculous dolls dressed up in pale blue and dark blue ribbon. Little groups of schoolboys collected behind us as if we were some strange animals from the Zoo, and bands of flappers, armed with autograph books, besieged us from all sides. But no one was feeling like autographs to-day, and we followed a policeman who cleared the crowd as we went up into the boat-house.

In the changing-room little piles of clean clothes lay along the benches. Languidly I undressed and put on my shorts. Damn! The top button had gone, and the next one to it was sure to come off. How annoying! These were the most comfortable shorts I had, and I should not feel at home in any others. I searched in the pile of dirty clothes in the corner. I would be comfortable and at my ease even if I did not look my best.

In the sitting-room piles of open telegrams lay on the table. No one bothered to look at them. Who cared a damn whether some old fellow of whom we had never heard wished us luck or not? Everyone was changed, and we got into the boat and went down for a preliminary outing. Our limbs felt wooden and stiff. Coee had greased our oars, oiled our slides, and polished the boat as none but he could do it.

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Once in the boat, things felt better, but the first few strokes felt unrhythmical and awkward. We tried a start, and the boat went bubbling through the water. Well, if only we started like that, we shouldn't have much to complain of. But would we? We paddled up to the mile post, eased, and lay drifting on the tide. Nobody talked, because nobody wanted to. A little party of ducks swam past. How I envied them! Though why the devil they wanted to come to this stinking place, Putney, when they could be splashing about on the Wash I could not imagine.

We turned round and paddled back to the boat-house. The coaches met us and were enthusiastic about our paddling. We knew as well as they did that the start was good, but the paddling slow and lifeless.

We had another hour to wait before the tide would be at its best, and with our blanket trousers pulled over our shorts and our scarves round our necks, we waited in the sitting-room. We shivered and shook, though the room was, if anything, too warm. First we felt full and then we felt empty, and however we sat we could never feel right. Slowly the clock ticked round. Dozens of Old Blues came in and tried to be cheery. It was all right for them to be feeling happy, but why the devil couldn't they leave us in peace and let us be miserable if we wanted to?

A loud speaker began to blare and shout from the Star and Garter Hotel. We could hear our names

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being read out, coupled with remarks both complimentary and uncomplimentary. The tide swirled up the river, and had just reached the drain known as the "Hole in the Wall." When the hole was half full we should have to start. There was an excited hum outside: Oxford were taking their boat down. Oh hell, now we were for it! There was no escape. We went into the changing-room, took our blanket trousers off, said good-bye to that nice, quiet, homely place, and walked out into the noisy world. Everyone stared and hoped that something would happen.

The boat felt like lead as we carried it down to the water. Fancy having to row this thing for four and a half miles! Surely somebody could have bought a boat lighter than this! I had to get in first. Cameras clicked all round ; it is so difficult to try to look unconcerned—as if one did not know one was being taken.

Two got in, and the boat was pushed up a few feet and in got three. How slow everyone was! Why couldn't they buck up and let us get away from this loathsome crowd! Now Lu was taking his place. With a final "Good luck," Coee Phillips, the boatman, pushed us off. Nearly thirty years before he had pushed my father off in the same way.

A dead dog floated down under my oar; of all things people might do to help, why couldn't they keep the dead dogs away? We took off our scarves and paddled down to Putney Bridge. We hadn't gone a minute when I began to feel out of breath, and this was only

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paddling! Obviously I should never be able to last as far as Mortlake.

We eased below Putney Bridge, and Oxford paddled past. How well their boat ran between the strokes! How sure they looked! They didn't care a damn for anyone. They would just row better than they had ever rowed before, and would be a length ahead at the end of the mile. They would then lengthen out and go right away, and we would get short and rushed.

We tried a start. "Come forward—are you ready?—Row," shouted the cox. At last the lethargy which had surrounded us all the morning left. We were clear of our green, boiling puddles at the third stroke. There, that was better! That had woken us up. We drifted through between the steamers. Our friends shouted and waved, calling to us by name. Only a few more seconds to go.

All nervousness left me, and now I felt strong and vigorous. I felt that I could row twice the distance and never turn a hair!

Here was our stake boat. Our stern was held, and the tide rushed bubbling past us. With a tide like this, we would be up there in no time. We took off our sweaters and scarves, and passed them down the boat. Never before had we rowed without our sweaters and scarves in the boat, and once more a tide of panic swept over me. Somehow this was different from practice. Would anything happen?

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"Touch her bow," shouted the cox. I touched her a bit too hard, and two had to touch her back, and then I had to touch her back again. Now at last we were straight.

The umpire held up his flag, and we squared our blades in the water and let the tide pull us out to our full reach. If the umpire did not say "Go" at the right moment, no one knew what would happen, but he always did.

Oxford, on the other hand, kept their blades on the feather, on top of the water, and at the word "Go" squared them and drove back. Every year we got a fifth of a second's advantage by starting with our blades square, which might be forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

"Are you ready once?—Are you ready?—Row!" What an unending stroke the first one seemed. At last our blades came through. The second stroke was a short one; we then swung out to the third and fourth. Now she was going well. Oxford, too, had had a good start, and were rowing a slightly faster stroke. I could see them out of the corner of my eye. They were bouncing their boat and lifting their bodies over, without driving from the stretcher with their legs.

I felt reassured. A thrill of excitement ran through me. Now we would settle down to it and go right away from them. But Lu was not hurrying in the least, and the puddles were true and green. There was no white water being washed out at the finish. We were

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rowing well in our stride. Lu was evidently waiting for Oxford to lose their breath. We were now drawing to the mile post. The roar of the crowd echoed in our ears. Oxford were about a third of a length ahead, rowing a faster stroke, and tearing their blades out with their arms. They were not going away any more, and were rowing three strokes a minute faster. We were holding them comfortably. As soon as we passed the mile post, the bell rang for ten strokes; in case we had not all heard, it was passed up the boat. I felt the crew lengthening out and steadying down, and then we let ourselves go. In ten strokes we were level, and in another twenty we were half a length ahead.

Oxford got thoroughly rattled as we shot past them. They became short and ragged, and seeing their discomfiture we grew longer and steadier. The distance between the boats opened out as we shot through Hammersmith Bridge. The race was now as good as over. The whole crew were rowing well within themselves, and I began to wish that we could have something to race against. It seemed a pity, after all these weeks of hard training, that we could not have a crew alongside us to drive us over the course!

The continuous cheering of the crowd along the banks as we rowed by and the hoots and whistles of steamers as we passed all added to our excitement. Oxford dropped farther and farther behind, and I knew now that if I looked round I should see Barnes Bridge, and Barnes was only three minutes from the

CAMBRIDGE CREW LEADING OXFORD AT
HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE



THE BOAT RACE

end. I began to think of the bread and cheese and beer that would be waiting for us in the Ibis boat club and the dinner and theatre that we should enjoy afterwards. I wondered if my father had thought these same thoughts thirty years before. Probably not; for in those days there was no question of feeling sorry for Oxford: they were formidable rivals.

I felt the shadow of Barnes Bridge above us; in a few moments I should be able to smell the smell of the brewery. Surely, the smell of malt and of tar and of the tang of seaweed on the marshes are the three best smells in the world. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the practice finishing post. Only ten more strokes, and we should easy. I counted them, and found there were thirteen.

We eased, and watched those poor perspiring wretches in the crew behind, who individually had expended far more energy than ourselves. Everyone of them was so tired that he could hardly swing forward for another stroke. If only that energy had been used to drive their boat through the water instead of up and down, what a different tale I should have to tell about the race!

We paddled into the boat-house and put our boat away for the last time. Forgotten were my thoughts of half an hour ago that I would never row again. Surely, rowing was the best sport in the world! As we washed and dressed we discussed plans for winning the Grand and going to the Olympic games.

VIII

THE SOLWAY

AS SOON AS the Boat Race celebrations were over, I dashed up to the Solway to have one more look at the geese before they migrated. Peter would join me a day later as he had not quite finished a picture, which was afterwards hung in the Academy.

I very much wanted to lie on the mud-bank where the grey lag geese roosted, and I thought if they did not come out till after dark I might very easily have a flock roosting all round me. I could see the mud-bank on which the geese would roost, and started to wade across towards it. By walking on tip-toe, I just prevented the water from pouring into my thigh boots, and landed safely on the mud-bank.

I found that it was much softer than that on the shores of the Nith, but it looked harder and drier farther on. I walked with short quick steps, for this is the best way to get along on soft mud, but it became more and more yielding, and I grew out of breath.

At last it began to dawn on me that it was not safe and if I did not look out I should get stuck. By this time I was quite out of breath, and decided to stop and

AFTER THE BOAT RACE IN 1932



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regain my wind before getting back to the shore. As I stood still panting, I saw my feet slipping into the mud with remarkable rapidity. Soon I should be too far in to get out. I must go at once. I struggled hard, and got one foot to the surface, but the other had sunk in almost up to my knee, and nothing would pull it out. I threw myself on my side, and tried to roll out, but the more I fought the farther I went in. Frantically I tried to spread myself as much as I could on the surface; I struggled madly to get free. I was caught like a fly on a fly-paper, and the more I writhed the tighter grew the grip.

By this time I was completely exhausted, and lay still trying to think what was the best thing to do, and to wait for my strength to return before making another effort. I was now in up to my waist, and I noticed that when I kept still I did not sink any farther. The tide was low luckily, but I knew that it was coming in and that by ten o'clock the mud-bank would be many feet under water. With this unpleasant thought uppermost in my mind, I made another desperate attempt. It did not take me long to realise, however, that it was absolutely impossible to get out without human aid, and that unless somebody came along in a boat I should be drowned. There was no point in exhausting myself in struggling when I had not the faintest hope of getting free, and it only made the mud suck me farther in; if I was still I did not sink any farther.

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A thin mist drifted up the estuary. A faint glow appeared in the sky where the sun would shortly set. The minutes ticked by, and I saw the tide coming slowly but steadily up the river. In an hour or two it would reach me, and that would be the end. I had often wondered how my end would come, but I had never expected that it would be anything like this. I remembered, with all its gruesome details, a story I had once been told of two English officers buried by the Irish just below high-tide mark in the sands. How the tide had only come up to their chins, and how next day they were still alive when the Sinn Feiners returned, so that they were dug up and buried a few feet farther down the beach. That time the tide had done its work. . . .

I turned my ear to the breeze. Yes, I could hear geese; they were flying too. I could hear their wild song coming across the marsh. Surely no sound connects the past with the present as the cries of the grey geese fighting in under the moon, and I thought of the old fen men, gone like the fens they loved, and wondered if it had sent their blood racing through their veins as it did my own. On came the geese, far out of shot, looking like grey ghosts against the sky, and passed inland to feed.

I remembered a night's fighting under the moon on the Wash. A little flock of geese came in heading the wind, and came straight to me. I fired twice; the first goose crumpled in the air and almost fell beside me,

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and another slanted out from the flock and planed down on to the mud. I picked up the dead bird and ran after the second, which was running away, but for a long time the goose kept ahead and I only just managed to keep it in view in the moonlight. Then I gained rapidly, and soon the little goose was only a few yards ahead. It stopped, cowering before me. A few drops of blood pattered on the sand. It stretched out its neck and honked, perhaps a last call of despair to its mate, perhaps a prayer for vengeance to the big round moon, shining through the mist. Perhaps this was the answer to that prayer of vengeance—that I should be caught in the mud and slowly die.

I wondered why I had always shot birds. Now I realised how they wanted to live—if only I could get out of the mud I would never shoot a bird again. A flock of curlews came flying in, and only seeing my head and shoulders sticking out of the mud they did not know what it was. Like most shore birds they are very curious, and flew round and round, diving just over my head and swerving up to the sky. Their easy flight seemed to be mocking my helplessness. The mud and estuary water would soon come swirling in to drown me! The thought made me struggle again. How funny that I should have always thought the brackish water so delightful. I had dreamt about it and thought about it; but had always connected it with wild-fowling and the friends that came with me, and never as something which would one day destroy me.

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To take my mind off such thoughts I shouted and yelled in the forlorn hope that some person would hear me. Though I did not know it, my shouts were heard by five fishermen, who thought it was a shepherd calling to his sheep. Time passed; the tide came nearer. Then, far away across the mud, I saw the heads of men rowing in a boat. The river forked below the mud-bank and if I did not succeed in making them hear, they might take the other fork.

I shouted like a maniac, but they took not the slightest notice. Finally I raised my voice into a shriek which almost broke my throat. They looked round, and encouraged by this I shrieked again. At last I saw one of them wave. They rowed up the river towards me, and brought their boat on to the mud-bank opposite.

"How the divil did you git ther?" came a Scotch voice.

"I walked here," I replied weakly.

"But how did ye cross the river?"

"I waded through."

"Well, I niver thought anyone could wade across the Cree. Wait a moment and we'll throw you a rope."

They pulled a rope off their nets, but it was too light and they could not reach me. One of them climbed out over the side, but the next moment he was up to his thighs in the mud and had to be dragged back into the boat by his friend. I saw that it was a

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big, heavily made boat, which would require a good depth of water to float it, and I thought that the tide would be over me before they could reach me with the rope.

A voice broke in on my thoughts: "We dinna ken how to get ye out. There won't be time to go and get a longer rope; the tide is coming in fast now. Wait a minute, we'll try the sand a little higher up." They rowed on a few strokes, and the youngest of them, kicking off his boots, coiled the rope round his waist and got out of the boat on to the mud on all fours. Every now and again he rolled about, sometimes on his hands and knees and sometimes lying on his back. Gradually he came nearer and nearer. The rope whistled through the air and landed within my reach. I tied it under my arms, but my fingers were so cold that I could only tie a most indifferent slip-knot.

He got back into the boat, and then five strong men pulled on it. I felt as if my legs were going to be torn off, and my head sank lower and lower into the mud till my chin was on the surface. I shouted to them to stop; and worked and worked until eventually one boot came up to the top with a squelch. My head was only just above the mud, and though one leg was now on the surface, my arms were buried deep.

Thinking that very soon my head might go under and that it was now or never, the fishermen pulled again with all their might. I felt my foot being pulled out of the boot, and the pressure of the rope was so tight

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

round my heart that I lost consciousness. I was pulled like a sack of potatoes across the mud to the boat. In the boat they revived me and shook me by the hand and patted me on the back, while I thanked them again and again for rescuing me. They rowed me ashore, and took me to the nearest farm. I was covered with mud and so cold that I was unable to undress myself. The good lady of the house held a cup of tea and brandy to my lips while the others took off my clothes, and soon I was lying in a hot bath none the worse for my experience.

As soon as I was dressed again, I invited my rescuers to come up to the hotel and celebrate with me. We all had several drinks, and I asked if there was anything I could give them to show my gratitude. The oldest one said: "Och no. I have a poor wild half-daft devil of a son, just like yourself. Perhaps one day someone will have to do the same for him. To see you standing there safe and sound is the only present we want."

The door swung open and in walked Jimmy Wilson, a very famous Solway wildfowler.

"Well, Jimmy, how did you get on in the courts?" Jimmy had just been to Dumfries; he had to answer a case brought by the salmon netters who wished to abolish Jimmy's flounder nets at the mouth of the river.

"Och, it was like this," said Jimmy; "I was in the witness box and the counsel for the salmon netters said to me: 'Now, Mr. Wilson, supposing it was a

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dark, moonless night and it happened to be low tide about midnight, and you went out to look in your flounder nets and there you saw a beautiful silver salmon, and supposing you looked round and you saw that there was no one about, what would you do?' Before I could answer," said Jimmy, "the Judge turned to the counsel and said, 'Don't ask the witness such a damn-fool question. What would you do yourself?' and the case was dismissed. Och, we must celebrate," said Jimmy, "we will all have another drink on me." So we did.

My friend, Peter Scott, arrived. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, we were to photograph geese together.

We went up to our room and put on sweaters over our pyjamas and sat by the open window overlooking the marsh. We could hear the curlews calling as they were awakened by the flooding tide, and the endless twittering of the stints and knots as they flew up and down the shore, the squawks of the gulls, the calling of the plover, and the soft splashing of the tide as it crept over the mud filling the pools and creeks: it now sounded beautiful, as it always had done. How glad I was to be sitting talking to Peter! Already I had forgotten the horrors of the mud. We set the alarm for four o'clock, and went to sleep.

Before the first smear of grey appeared in the east, I was crouching in a creek, with a camera and not a

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

gun, and smelling the wonderful smell of brackish water, seaweed, and mud. Gradually dawn broke. Small bunches of wigeon and mallard passed overhead, flying out to sea. A redshank settled almost beside me. For a few seconds it ran about digging its beak into the mud; then it saw me and vanished into the gloom. A stream of gulls and curlew flew inland to feed, followed by a gaggle of grey lags flying in a V. I saw them on the focusing screen, but there was not yet enough light to make an exposure. Higher and higher they rose, and disappeared against the blue hills behind.

Far out on the sand I saw a big flock of geese. I watched them through my glasses. Some were preening their feathers, others appeared to be picking up grit, and some still had their heads under their wings.

For an hour nothing happened. Then a little bunch turned and faced the wind, ran a little way, making a great noise, and gradually rose into the air. On they came straight for me. I looked hurriedly over my camera to see if everything was ready. They slanted off slightly so that the nearest goose would pass about thirty yards out; but no, they circled round, and pitched once more on the sand. An incessant cackling broke out. One might think they had made an expedition to the North Pole by the amount each goose had to say. Gradually the noise died down; the excitement of the expedition had been forgotten. I turned my glasses farther along the shore. A pair of shelduck

GREYLAG GEESE BEFORE SETTLING ON THE MARSH

Photo by the Author



THE SOLWAY

were investigating the prospects of breakfast in a shallow pool; their reflections were distorted by the wavelets. What a lovely photograph they would make. Every now and again the drake threw back his head and whistled. No doubt he was telling his mate of the untenanted rabbit hole he had found in the sand-dunes the other day.

A party of oyster catchers, looking like old gentlemen in their dress clothes, settled by the edge of the tide. Farther along a seal lay basking in the sun. He looked glassy and pale.

Suddenly goose conversation began again. Down the shore came a little party of grey lags. They saw the geese below and set their wings as if they were going to settle, and then flew on. With a roar the big flock rose into the air and followed their comrades, calling to them to wait.

I watched the grey line disappearing in the distance, and the wind brought back their mad wild song, even more thrilling in its faintness.

Peter had caught grey lags and barnacle geese in the net trap he had invented himself. Three weeks went by and I had taken many indifferent snaps of geese I had stalked, but most of them were too distant or out of focus. I found the stalking fairly easy. Most of the creeks on this particular marsh are deep and have fine hard, sandy bottoms. The difficulty was to get the camera over the sky line and focused before the geese were well on the wing.

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

One red-letter day I saw some geese fly inland and pitch in a field not far from the sea wall. I knew the field well. It was surrounded by a bank two feet high, along which ran a wire fence. Soon I was wriggling across the field next to the one the geese were in. I headed for the up-wind corner of the field, as I knew they would feed up-wind to the bank, not to enable them to smell danger but because they don't like the wind blowing under their feathers from behind.

I headed for a bunch of rushes, and raised my head to peep through. There were about a hundred grey lags. They were feeding towards me. For ten minutes I watched their plump grey bodies and orange beaks glistening in the sunlight and listened to their talk.

It was now or never; I took off my coat, an old Green Lovat tweed so plastered with mud as to be indistinguishable from the salting. Inch by inch I raised it till it was hanging over the bottom strand of the wire fence. The geese were still feeding towards me. I got up behind it and took out my knife; it seemed a pity, but it had to be done then, and remembering that it was not my coat, but only one of Peter's, so that it didn't matter at all, I parted the seam in the back and slipped the lens through the hole. The geese fed across in front of the camera about thirty-five yards away, directly down-wind, and I took picture after picture until my film pack was finished. Then I lay and watched them for several hours, till an aeroplane flying overhead put them up.

THE SOLWAY

I had now photographs of the grey lags feeding in the fields and flighting from their roosting-places on the sand. I was determined to take a picture of them in the creeks on the salt marshes, where I had followed them so often.

For four years now I had been goose mad, and had thought and dreamed of wild geese until I really believe I began to think like a goose and I could tell almost exactly into what part of the marsh they would flight.

The geese were of a flock of barnacles, the nearest one only about ten feet away. I have had a grey lag within a yard of me. It actually ate grass off my hide and drank rain-water out of one of my own foot-prints.

Beginner's luck! Those were the days when I first started to take a camera instead of a gun to the saltings. The nearer the geese came the greater became my excitement and my incompetence. I would expose the same plate two or three times, and once I took a whole film pack without removing the dark slide. Sometimes my camera jammed, when too much sand and mud penetrated the works; and once what would have been my best picture was spoilt when I fell into a creek up to my waist, with two exposed film packs of geese washing in a pool fifteen yards away.

One afternoon—I had not gone out at dawn, as it had been pouring with rain—I wandered out to retrieve a thermos I had left in my hide the day before.

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

For luck I took the camera, and as I reached the hide I saw a skein of geese come flying up the marsh. I threw myself in and called to them. A minute later they pitched in front, walked down into the creek, and began to drink. Then a sheep-dog came galloping over the marsh and put them up, but not before I had taken a photograph, and I had not been away from the car a quarter of an hour.

MY FATHER CATCHING BUTTERFLIES IN CORSICA

Photo by the Author



IX

BUTTERFLIES AND BRIGANDS

I RETURNED HOME and my father asked me to join him on a few days' trip to Corsica to catch some rare butterflies. I had always heard of the Corsican Brigands, and it seemed to me that this was the nearest place to England where one might meet wild interesting people, and I was delighted when my father offered to take me on a short trip. There was just time before the summer term began. Father is a great butterfly catcher. When he does a thing he either does it as well as anyone else has done it before, if not better, or he leaves it alone; but when he gets into the front rank he usually decides that it is too easy and not worth while bothering about any more, and he starts again on some new enterprise. At various times he has been hailed as the best dry fly fisherman in England, and the best rowing coach, and now he is on the high way to having the best collection of European butterflies in the country.

Two days later early in the morning we sighted Corsica. I had always heard that one could smell the aromatic smell of the Macqui, the Corsican bush, far out to sea. Imagination is a powerful thing, and I

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

certainly believed I could smell Corsica many hours before its blue hills rose into view. We journeyed up into the mountains and spent several days chasing butterflies. One day I wandered along the railway line by myself and saw an old Corsican in a black hat and a black velvet coat chopping down a tree. He took off his hat and bowed. He asked me to come to his house, which I could see through the trees, to drink some milk. I could speak fairly good French. Not what I'd learnt at school. It is impossible to learn anything but the worst French at an English school. But I had picked up a good deal from my sister's governess.

He was a very old man, good looking, and though extremely ignorant about the affairs of the outside world, was very interesting to talk to. His wife brought us two wooden bowls of goat's milk, some brown bread and some very excellent cheese.

"You are unlike our sons of Corsica, a land that was good enough for Napoleon Bonaparte is not good enough for them." I refrained from telling him that Napoleon too had left Corsica for France at an early age. "They migrate to Canada and America, but you are a young man and you have come to Corsica. Why have you come?" Before I had time to answer, "Ah, I know, you need not tell me, you are a great scientist, a professor at one of your universities, you come to catch butterflies. What do you do with them when you have caught them?" and again before I could

BUTTERFLIES AND BRIGANDS

answer he continued, "Ah, I know, first you pin them on a board and then you take photographs of them. Of course everybody thinks that we in Corsica are ignorant, uncivilised people. They think it is merely a country of bandits, but there are few of them left now. Oh yes, we know all about photography in Corsica. We are not so backward as you think."

A butterfly flew in through the door and fluttered helplessly against the window. The old man leapt to his feet and seized the butterfly between finger and thumb. He smiled with the joy of achievement and handed me a much battered, and completely useless blue. I took out a collecting box and opening the lid took the butterfly from his fingers. I thanked him very much. Through the glass lid of the box I was glad to see that its wings were not badly damaged. As soon as I left I would loose it to enjoy the remainder of its short life, flitting among the Corsican flowers.

He began to tell me how he fought in the Great War. We heard a strange sound outside and there crossing a little glade barely fifty yards from the house was a wild boar. The old man's eyes popped out of his head and he gave a great hiss of excitement. "Sanglier—Sanglier," he hissed.

On a beam over the fireplace was an ancient species of firearm. Whether it was a gun or rifle I do not know. He pulled it off its hook. Apparently it was

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

loaded. He put it straight to his shoulder. There was a bang and the room was filled with smoke. He rushed out through the door and loosing a howling dog that was already straining at its chain, he disappeared into the forest. For several minutes I could hear its baying, then all was silence. I made my way back to the hotel and passing a sunny glade, one mass of flowers, I freed the captive butterfly.

Up till now we had been the only people staying at the Inn. But alas! a brightly coloured French woman had arrived who insisted on talking to us all the time. Talking to strange females is not my father's strongest point, and I was left to answer the questions of this brightly coloured over-scented tourist. At first there was a long description of the beautiful butterflies she had seen in the garden; secondly the hardships of the terrible journey from France to Corsica, and in next to no time we learnt of the death of her husband, who had died fighting in the trenches, of her son and his illnesses, of her own illnesses, of the little dog that she had had to leave behind and of the rudeness of all the people she met. I no longer heard what she said. Occasionally I nodded and said "Oui," and occasionally I shook my head and said "Non."

Dinner was served. We were in the middle of our soup. Suddenly I realized I was being asked a question. What did we do with all the beautiful butterflies we caught? I was thinking of the old man I had talked to and wondering whether he had got the



MONTÉ D'ORO—A FORMER BRIGAND STRONGHOLD

BUTTERFLIES AND BRIGANDS

boar. "We put them in a butterfly cabinet." She did not understand—of course I must say it in French. "Nous les mettons dans une cabinet." My father had a mouthful of soup and I thought he was bound to do the nose trick, but with amazing self-control he swallowed it. The French lady thought I was being deliberately rude, and after giving me a withering glance, continued her meal in silence.

We had caught the butterflies we wanted and once more descended the mountain railway. A Corsican who was learning English and wished to practice took a seat in our carriage. In Corsica all the first-class carriages are full of people with third-class tickets, and up to now we had been travelling third in perfect seclusion. He pointed to a spot by a little sandy road. "That is where they killed a famous brigand. If you read our papers you will doubtless have heard of the bravery of our police force, but I have heard the real story. The police found out that there was a spy acting for the brigand who warned him every time there was going to be a raid, so they issued false information that the police were going after another brigand at the other end of the island. All but two actually did go by train, and these two hid themselves by the little sandy road that we have just passed. The brigand, thinking all was safe, and wishing to see some friends, mounted his favourite horse and calling to his half-grown terrier puppy set off down the road. He approached the spot where the policemen lay in ambush,

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

but they were well hidden. He saw no sign of danger, and passed them. The policemen were armed with shot guns loaded with buckshot and at point blank range they emptied four barrels into his back. After reloading they came out of their hiding places and again discharged their guns into the motionless body. The terrier pup, which at the sound of the shooting thought there would be game, and had scampered off into the bush, returned and whined piteously round its dead master. Once more shots rang out, and the ferocious beast was laid low."

We were nearing the station. The sea burst into view. There was our ship and after seeing us on board our friend said good-bye.

X

HENLEY

THE SUMMER TERM was drawing to its close. This was my last term at Cambridge. There had only been one vacancy in the Sudan Civil Service, which I had been counting on for a career. I had been to the Appointments Board. A preliminary interview had already taken place, and I was told that it really wasn't worth while my considering the Sudan Civil, as I was not reading for an Honours degree, and that there were many people with firsts and Blues trying for it. The Appointments Board were very kind and polite, and took down all sorts of details which I couldn't really see mattered in the least.

"Well, what do you really want, Mr. Haig-Thomas?" I knew quite well the experience of my friends, who had said what they really wanted, and were told that that was really quite impossible with the depression as it was.

"Just give me a job," I had said. "I don't mind what it is as long as it has good prospects one day, and I don't mind where I go." But nothing was offered. I had been to London and interviewed several people, but it was always the same story: that just now things

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

were awfully bad, and that they were getting rid of people instead of getting fresh ones, and how fed up I was with the usual farewell sentence, "Of course, Mr. Haig-Thomas, if anything should arise we will bear your name in mind."

I made my mind up then and there that, if I couldn't get a job, I wouldn't hang about in England and do nothing, but that I would fulfil the promise I had made as a little boy of five and would travel and see the world and do all the things I had wanted to do. I laughed as I remembered that I had said I would poach and roam like the gipsies. I remembered that I had made several poaching expeditions, but I resolved to poach no more. It had been good fun; perhaps it was rather hard on the keepers and the owners whose game I had shot.

I, like my father and my grandfather before me, would go down without a degree. Grandfather never looked like passing an exam. Father passed one and I had passed two, and I thought it would spoil the family tradition if I did any more, as well as being impertinent to my elders and betters!

The May Races were over, and at last the college balls dragged themselves out to their dreary end. It was with a feeling of sorrow that we said good-bye to Cambridge and got into our cars to go to Henley.

Perhaps of all the fortnights in the year, the Henley fortnight was the most enjoyable. Our boat had been sent the day before, and we knew that everything

HENLEY

would be ready for an evening's outing. We drove on to Henley Bridge and looked down the familiar course. There were the rows of white piles and booms running in a straight line from start to finish, the changing tents, the rafts, and the little lines of boatmen greeting old friends, whom they met again every year. Everything was just as I had always known it. Here and there a crew was paddling down the course, red-faced men shouted through megaphones and spare men were running up and down the bank in shorts, looking enviously at the crews on the water.

We drove on to the house that we had taken, and Kenneth and I, who were the first to arrive, pinched the best room, which looked out onto a garden. We threw our things on the beds and strolled down to the club to hear the news.

It was after lunch, and glasses of port, cups of coffee, or pints of beer were being held in every hand. In one corner of the room sat the old Blues of the 'nineties, discussing an imaginary crew of the eight best oars that had ever rowed, and putting one another into it in turn. In front of the fireplace stood the Metropolitan oarsmen, smiling and joking quietly among themselves. They were certain that they were the only clubs that knew what rowing meant. From an armchair came the loud voice of a man with cheeks like slabs of red beef; he looked as if all his life he had burnt the candle at both ends and in the middle.

"No; it isn't that that annoys me. It isn't that

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

these young fellers can't sit their boats. They can. It isn't that they don't go fast. They do. What makes me angry"—his voice grew louder and louder until we heard it all over the crowded room—"is that they think that they're rowing, and they're not."

Sir Henry, the Lady Margaret coach, who has coached more winners of the Ladies' Plate since the war than anyone else, thought his crew had the race in their pocket again this year. He was quite determined not to let anybody know it, and was saying: "No, Jerome. How can you say my crew is a good crew? It's an extraordinary crew. Why? There are two people in it whose names begin with 'Q.'"

As well as being a great coach, Sir Henry is extremely attractive to cats! Quite often, when he is going home in the evening, stray cats will follow him, and it is no good his saying: "Go away, go away. I don't want you." They will come. Sometimes they have even been known to sit on his doorstep and "miaow" and keep him awake at night.

By the door stood the victorious Cambridge coaches of the last few years. They did not need to advertise their successes, although everyone thought that their crews had won, not because they themselves were so good, but because Oxford was so bad. They were in too strong a position to have to listen to anyone, and were laying down the law right and left.

Over at the writing-desks sat two young men who had just been elected, and were writing as many letters

SIR HENRY HOWARD COACHING AT CAMBRIDGE

Photo by the Author



HENLEY

as possible on Leander paper to advertise the fact. The sun poured in through the open windows on this familiar scene. Some old faces were missing and new ones had taken their places, but the red faces, big tummies, and the eternal "I" never varied.

I wondered if these men could see the humorous side of themselves, and whether in a few years' time I should not find myself in a bloated condition, standing with my back to the fireplace, and saying: "Well, of course, you know, rowing is not what it was in the old days." Each one listened with impatience while his friend told how he had won the Grand, itching for the story to come to an end so that the really interesting tale of what he himself had done should not be withheld from those who would obviously be so eager to hear. How they all enjoy their Henley!

We left them to their enjoyment, and went down to look at the boat. Coee was fussing about, measuring the height of the work, oiling the slides, and making little alterations here and there. "Well, I hope you will be comfortable, sir," he said, as I stood admiring the graceful lines of our new boat. She was made to take into three bits, so that, in case we won the Grand, we should have the same boat to take to America with us.

We wandered down the course. It was a beautiful June day, and a slight breeze was rustling the poplars. A moorhen flew across the river, and splashed in the water at the other side. How we enjoyed being

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

back by the Thames again. We walked on in silence down to the island and back, thinking of the races we had rowed in the past and of the ones to come.

When the others arrived, we got into our new boat and paddled down. The warm June evening loosened our muscles. How delightful it was to get out of our heavy, college crews and to get into a crew where everyone helps to sit the boat and to do his share. We experienced that most delightful of all sensations, rhythmical swing, the run of the boat, the purring of our slides, and the swirling, boiling puddles that were pushed down past our rudder. It all felt so effortless. We were brought forward by the run of the boat, and had only to flick our blades into the water, drive with our legs, and swing back with our bodies. The next moment the blades were through and we were slowly sliding forward for the next stroke. We paddled round Temple Island and back to the boathouse; after putting our boat away, we dived into the river. The cold Thames water washed the sticky perspiration from our hands and faces. For a second or two we lay floating in perfect bliss, and then turned and climbed out, shook ourselves, and ran into the changing-room.

The days slipped by until the Regatta started. The enclosure was one mass of snow-white tents and brilliant flowers shining in the sun. To the strains of the latest tunes women, in long, brightly hued dresses with parasols, walked about accompanied by

ENJOYING AN EVENING AT HENLEY BEFORE THE
REGATTA



HENLEY

young men—delighted at last to be out of sober clothes—in white flannel trousers and flaunting blazers of every conceivable colour.

As we ourselves had to row later, we were not allowed to walk about in the sun, but had to sit quietly in the shade of one of the stands. Our friends came and talked to us, and it was most tantalising not to be able to walk on the lawns, where the pretty dresses and slim figures seemed to invite us to come for a stroll. We had, alack, more serious work to do, and had to leave them to what we devoutly hoped would be the boring conversation of other young men.

Saturday, the last day of the Regatta, arrived. We had won our heats, and were going to row the final before lunch. So we were the envy of all the crews who were not rowing till the afternoon and could not break training till the evening. There was a good deal of feeling as to who would win. For several years the Metropolitan crews had thought themselves vastly superior to either of the Varsity boats. They had always hankered for a trial of strength, and now, though we were rowing under Leander colours, we were the identical crew that had won the Boat Race. They now hoped to put Tideway rowing indisputably at the top of the ladder. Thames, the premier Metropolitan club, had collected several of their last Olympic crew, and had been practising very seriously for many months; we knew that they had a tremendous advantage in age and racing experience.

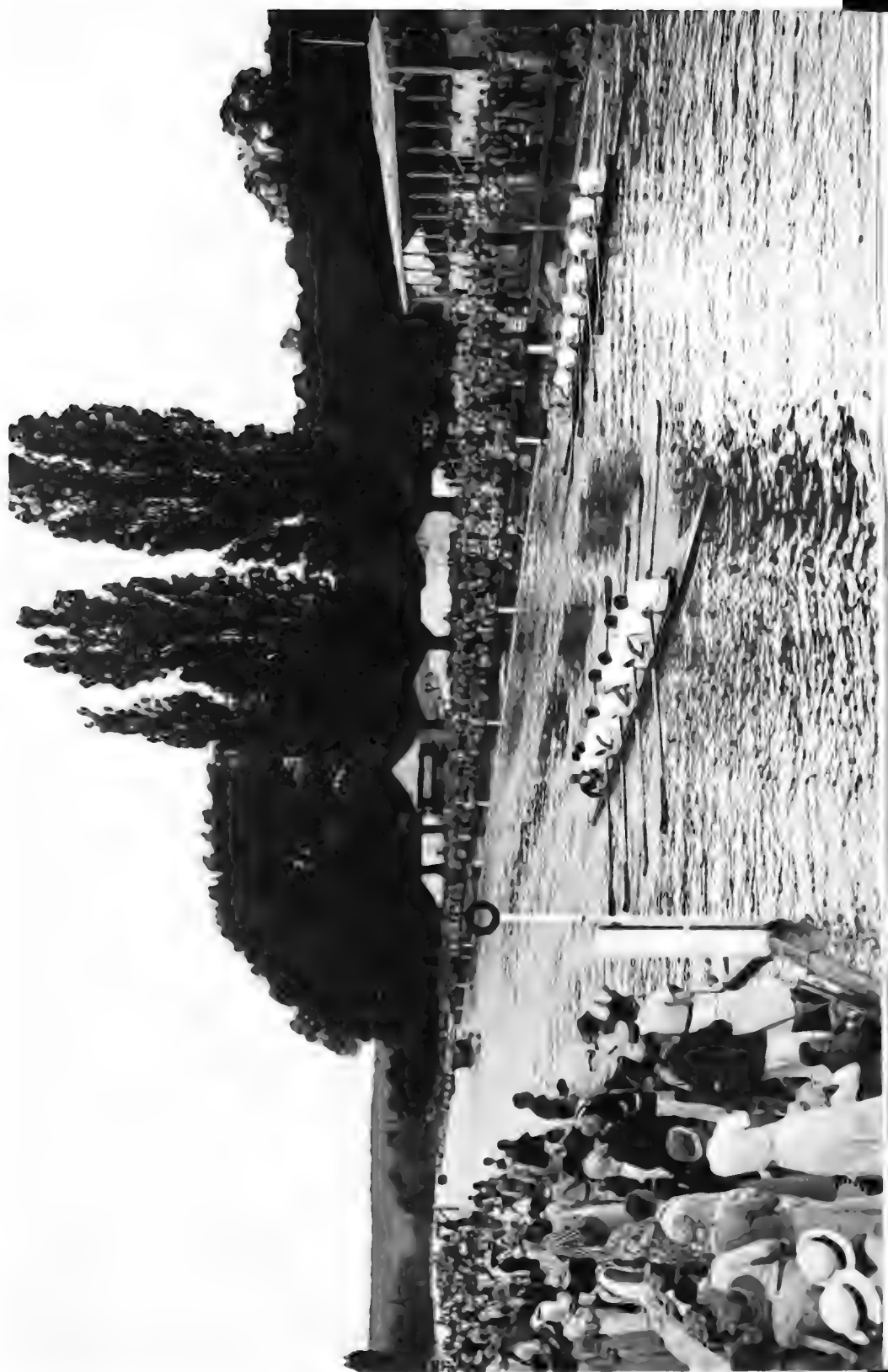
I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

At the start we eyed each other with respect, both knowing that we should have to race all the way to get home first. The umpire held up his flag and we were off. Being younger and probably more supple, we pinched half a length before we reached the top of the island in the first minute, and then steadied down to try and row our best.

Thames, who knew the game well, would not be hurried. Their boat was running smoothly through the water, and they, too, settled down to their best pace. We continually gave her tens, but only increased our lead by a few feet. At half-way there was no change. Thames never spurted at all, but, try as we might, we could not get away from them.

We reached the mile post, Thames having come up slightly. It was going to be the devil of a race. It was now or never, and both crews went for it for all they were worth. Thames gained very slightly, and it might have been anyone's race to the last hundred yards. I had never been quite so fit and had never reached such a stage of exhaustion. Everything went dim and red. I was past all feeling of fatigue. A few more strokes and the flag dropped. We lay panting and gasping for breath, conscious only of the fact that we had won the Grand and would be going to represent England at Hollywood.

THE CAMBRIDGE CREW ROWING UNDER LEANDER
COLOURS WINNING THE GRAND CHALLENGE CUP
FROM THAMES ROWING CLUB AT HENLEY



XI

BURGLARS

THE SPARKS OF the last firework fell into the river and the crowds began to disperse towards the fair. I wandered along the tow-path through the now deserted stewards' enclosure. Just as I was going into Leander to join in the revelry I met George, James and Freddie. They were in very good form.

"Come on, David, and help us burgle a house."
"Rather," I said.

We found two canoes pulled up on the Leander raft and without waiting to ask whose they were we paddled upstream. It was a glorious summer's evening, cool and refreshing after the heat of the day. We went under Henley Bridge, and as we didn't want to be recognised, carried our canoes over the weir instead of going through the lock.

At last we arrived at the house we intended to burgle. It was a very big house on the left bank of the river and, hiding our canoes under a willow, we walked up a valley under a big archway across beautifully-kept lawns towards the house. My heart was beating very fast and every shadow seemed to me to conceal a policeman. Suddenly overhead an owl hooted. We all jumped.

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

We tiptoed quietly round the house and found an open window on the ground floor. George began to push it up.

"Quick," hissed Freddie, "someone's coming." I don't think I have ever ran so fast. We bolted for the shelter of some nearby rhododendron bushes and threw ourselves flat on the ground.

Freddie was laughing. "Come on," he said, "I was only pulling your legs."

Feeling a little ashamed of ourselves we followed him back. "You go first after that, Freddie," said George.

At last we were all inside, listening intently, each imagining that his own heart was making enough noise to wake the dead. There was no sound anywhere, and so creeping carefully round the wall we turned on the light. It seemed awfully bright, somehow we hadn't expected a bright light like this, and we all instinctively moved towards the window. However, all was silent and our courage returned. It was a billiard room and soon we had the balls and cues out and had started a game. We got tired of playing and started to explore the house. I went first and cautiously felt my way down the passage. Every moment I expected someone quietly to bang me on the head. I stopped suddenly just in time to avoid running into a door. Should I open it? No, suppose there was a man with a poker standing behind it. However a whispered "Get on; open it" from George,

BURGLARS

made me pluck up my courage, and very gently I turned the handle. There was no one there.

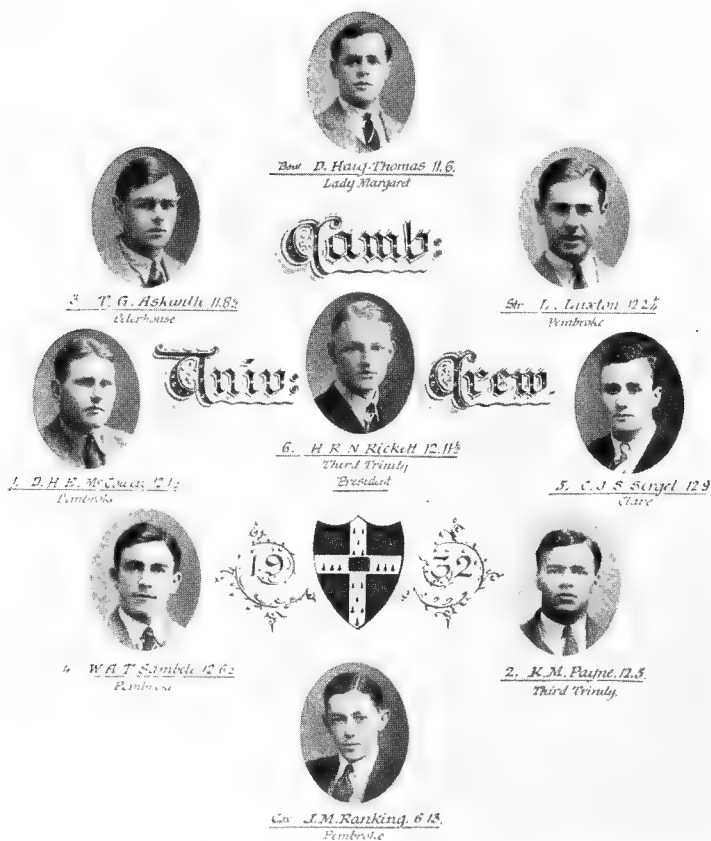
We closed the door and turned the light on: the kitchen. Thank God to see a nice light again and to feel the safety of a shut door between us and that awful passage. On the table lay the menu. What were they going to have for lunch? Soup, oysters, roast duck and green peas, some pudding with a French name. This would never do. We rubbed it out and wrote an ordinary training luncheon. Cold beef, salad, and half a pint of beer. Then we went on into the pantry and filled all the sugar castors with salt and all the salt cellars with sugar. We were gaining confidence. It seemed impossible to wake this household. I quite began to fancy myself as a burglar.

"Let's go upstairs," I said, and once again we padded softly down the thickly carpeted passage and up the front stairs. We paused at the top. Dead silence. Then we went on, James stumbled against a shoe and we all held our breath. That shoe seemed to make as much noise as a hundred-weight of coal. However, none woke, and it gave us an idea and we changed all their shoes about. When we passed one door we could hear a man snoring. It was a reassuring sound. We found an open door and pushed our way in. We dared not turn on the light but our torch showed us a writing table. We started to write a note on the extreme carelessness of people who left windows open. Suddenly we heard a noise, an

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

unmistakable noise. Someone was telephoning. Without a moment's hesitation we left the room and softly hurried down the passage the way we had come. Where were the stairs? We walked on, surely they should be here. Then we realised we were lost. We had been up so many passages changing the shoes that we had got turned round. We must be going the wrong way. Dare we go back? Should we meet the telephonist with a poker in the passage, or should we be too late and meet the police? Certainly we should never get out this way so we turned round and walked again up that awful passage. Every doorway seemed to be full of people until one reached it, and then they seemed to be hiding in the next one.

At last we came to the stairs, and taking little notice of the noise we made, we ran down them into the billiard room and out again into the cool, friendly night. Even outside we were not at ease and as we raced down the lawns we saw the torch beams in the valley by the main road coming up the hill; perhaps it was the police. We didn't wait to see but ran into the trees. We reached the canoes safely and paddled homewards. On the way home George said, "I wasn't frightened you know, I knew nothing could happen to us; we didn't take anything." The rest of us weren't so sure.



CAMBRIDGE CREW, 1932

WON THE BOAT RACE AND THE GRAND CHALLENGE
CUP AT HENLEY AND REPRESENTED ENGLAND AT LOS
ANGELES

XII

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

THE *Empress of Britain* cast off. The hundreds of paper streamers that connected us with the shore snapped and were carried by the wind high into the air. We waved good-bye, and watched the people on the quay getting smaller and smaller, till finally they were unrecognisable. Then we turned away to have a look over the ship.

Long rolls of matting were stretched along the decks, so that we could run up and down without jarring our feet. The first-class gymnasium and swimming baths were thrown open to us, though in theory we were travelling tourist third. The British delegates going to Ottawa were also on board, and as we ran up and down the deck in our blanket trousers and sweaters we would occasionally meet Mr. Baldwin, Jimmy Thomas, or Ramsay MacDonald. It made it rather exciting, as one never knew whom one would meet round the next corner.

We spent most of our time in the gymnasium, playing about on the ridiculous rowing machines. Lu and Kenneth had a stupid game that they played with a punch-ball on an iron spring. One pulled it back farther than it was meant to go, and tried to hit the

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

other on the rebound. I was sitting on the rowing machine in front of a looking-glass and idly wondering what would be my chances with the film stars in Hollywood when we came out of training. Lu, seeing that I was watching myself in the glass, took a shot at me. He pulled back the ball, there was a sharp snap as a piece of the string broke, and the ball flew through the air, missing my head by a fraction of an inch and smashing the big plate mirror in front of me. The instructor, who was at the other end of the room, turned round, but by this time both Lu and Kenneth were nowhere to be seen, and no one knew who had broken the punchball.

One afternoon I was walking round the deck with Lu. We were both rather bored with the sea voyage, and were looking forward to arriving in Canada.

"Well, if you want something to do," he said, "I bet you ten bob that you won't go and make friends with Stanley Baldwin and walk round the deck with him within five minutes."

I am one of those stupid people who if anybody says I can't do a thing immediately go and do it. Stanley Baldwin was only a few yards behind us and was coming up level. Now was my chance.

"Look there!" I shouted in a voice loud enough for him to hear, and at the same time pointed out of the window. Mrs. Baldwin fell into the trap. She looked such a simple, kind old lady that it seemed almost a shame to catch her in such a way.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

"What do you see?" she said.

"A whale or something. It came right out of the water just there," I lied.

For a moment or two we all stared at the sea, which was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond, and then unconsciously we all three sauntered off together. Somehow I had to keep going until I got them back opposite Lu to win my bet. As it happened, I had no difficulty, because Stanley Baldwin was very interested in rowing, and though he usually came to see the Boat Race, he was more thrilled to see a school crew of boys beat college crews of men at Henley.

The tea gong went and we said good-bye. I went to claim my winnings, one of the easiest ten bobs I have ever earned.

We came into the river, and when we were in sight of Quebec, aeroplanes, tugs, and motor boats, decorated with flags and hooting their sirens, came out to meet us. Somewhere guns were fired off in welcome.

A special train was waiting for us, and we were soon tearing through the growing dusk towards Ottawa. Here we stopped for an hour or two, and William Goldsmith, a most unpleasant-looking Canadian politician who had lost his seat in the last election, was fussing around trying to get himself photographed with the British Olympic Team. He asked any of us to come and stay with him on our way back, and impressed on us that all we had to do was to ring him

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up from the station; I decided then and there that if I wanted a place to stay on my way back, it would be cheaper than staying in a hotel.

We continued our journey to Toronto, where a special train was to take us to Los Angeles through Chicago, together with the Canadian and South African teams, who had joined us. We reached the American frontier, and emigration officers came aboard and we were handed forms to fill up. I soon got very bored and rather annoyed about the interest of the American authorities in what I thought were my own private affairs. I felt that the last straw was when they wanted to know what sex I was. So I wrote: "I am very sorry, but I don't know. My mother never told me and I don't know how to find out!"

Unfortunately I never had the fun of seeing anyone read it through. All the forms were collected and the train crossed the frontier into the United States. At every station we were welcomed by cheering crowds and flags. There was one tall young man on the train whom we all took to be a runner. He always made himself very pleasant to the rowing people, and though we often wondered just who he was and what he did, he always seemed to avoid answering any questions. We heard later that the athletic people thought he was a rowing man, and it was not until we were within a few hours of Los Angeles that the authorities realised that he was not a member of any of the teams, but merely an enterprising young American who thought

IN THE OLYMPIC STADIUM AT LOS ANGELES

Photo by the Author



THE OLYMPIC GAMES

he would get a free ride to the games. The train stopped and he was ignominiously seen off it by one of the train men, but we all hung out of the window and cheered him. He waved back and shouted that he would meet us again in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles was very disappointing. Somehow I had expected to see film stars all over the station, but many hundreds of athletes had arrived before us and there was no one to meet or welcome us on our arrival. The Olympic village that had been built for us on Beverley Hills was twenty-five miles from where we had to row. This would be too far for us to motor down twice a day in that tremendous heat; so we stayed in a hotel at Long Beach, only two or three miles from the boathouse. It was right on the beach and we could bathe every morning before breakfast.

We practised twice a day and the boat was going really well. The American crew had not arrived, for they were only coming down from their home waters three days before the race; but all the other crews were there, and none of them looked particularly good. We all felt quite confident that, unless the American crew was very much better than the others, we should have no difficulty in winning. The standard of rowing was definitely lower than that to which we were accustomed at Henley.

The next day we were told to go to the stadium for the opening ceremony. We had each kept a pair of white flannel trousers specially for the occasion; we

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were wearing our Olympic blazers, with Union Jacks on the pockets, and hoped to appear as smart as possible. We formed up in ranks, the tallest in front, outside the Stadium. I had smuggled a small camera in my pocket, as I thought it would be fun to take photos of the ridiculous things we should have to do.

The Stadium was packed. One hundred and twenty thousand people had come to see the opening ceremony. Already speeches were being made to prepare the crowd for the sight they were going to witness, and some emotional people were almost in tears. We heard a national anthem being played and the cheers of the crowd as the team belonging to some small country marched through the tunnel into the Stadium, led by one of their members carrying his country's flag.

The Canadians were already following in, and now it was our turn. We marched in with our chests puffed out and our heads up according to instructions. Lord Burghley led the English team, carrying a huge Union Jack. It had been decided that, as he was going to race the next day, he would not have to carry the flag round the Stadium in the boiling heat; but shortly before we were going to start, it was found that his chief rival in the American team, a much larger man than himself, was going to carry the American flag, and so Burghley very sportingly insisted on carrying the Union Jack himself, and thereby, as most people think, lost his chance of winning the hurdles.

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The other countries were lined up in the centre, the band played "God Save the King" and a massed choir of several hundreds of boys and girls dressed in white surplices began to sing.

We marched in a very slow step, feeling most ridiculous as we gradually approached the centre of the Stadium, where stood the representative of the President. On coming opposite to him we turned our eyes smartly to the right, and marched on in a slow, measured step along the track. The people just by us were clapping, and the clapping went round in the same circle as we did ourselves. In the middle of the Stadium was a huge box covered by the flags of all the countries. I wondered what part it was going to play and what was inside it.

We lined up beside Canada, and as we did so the German team marched in through the tunnel. The Germans, too, saw the funny side of the proceedings. At last all the countries had assembled and were standing at attention in the middle of the arena. The President's representative now began to make a speech, which was relayed by loud-speakers. Apparently none of us were gentlemen or had any idea of sporting behaviour, and we were told again and again that it was just as much honour to be a sporting loser as to be victorious. Then a voice through a loud-speaker declared the Olympic Games open.

Cannons began to fire, and behind a tower built at one end of the Stadium six fools dressed in the

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costumes of Greek trumpeters blew a ridiculous call on their instruments. At the same time flames appeared at the top of the tower. These were not meant to go out until the Games were over, but they showed signs of being blown out any minute. There still remained the surprise of the great box, and everyone was looking at it and wondering what was going to happen. Finally, amid many creakings, it opened at the top. Inside it were ten thousand pigeons that were supposed to fly up and tell the world that the Games were open.

Now, Americans are very kind to birds and animals, and though imprisoned in their box these pigeons had had plenty to eat. Out they flew, delighted to spread their wings again in the sun; but the walls of the Stadium were several hundred feet high, and to get sufficient height, the pigeons had to fly round and round over the heads of the people in the Stadium. As I said before, the pigeons had been well fed and they had had no exercise. Hence they were unable to prevent nature following its natural course, to the dismay of the audience, who tried in vain to dodge. Round and round they flew, until at last they had reached sufficient height and disappeared over the parapet to try to find their way back to their homes.

We now held up our hands and swore the Olympic oath and marched out. We had two or three more days before the Regatta began.

The weather was terribly hot, and gradually the crew



Photo by the Author

WATCHING THE PIGEONS FLYING ROUND THE STADIUM AT
LOS ANGELES

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became lifeless. Our leg drive diminished, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we could row a fast stroke. Our rhythm began to go, we lost our steadiness and poise, and within a few days of the race we had deteriorated from the best crew to the fifth or sixth. We tried to get back our old form. If only my father or "Two Legs," who had both coached the crew in the Boat Race and for the Grand, had come with us, we should never have got into this state. (Why Squadron Leader F. E. Hellyer was called "Two Legs" I never found out, as it doesn't seem extraordinary for a man to have two legs! Rumour has it that he was shot down in the War, his legs being badly injured, and that for some time he had a curious walk which earned the nick-name.)

Finally our efforts began to have some slight effect, and we started to improve again, though we were undoubtedly a couple of lengths slower than we had been at Henley a month before.

Our heat consisted of Japan, Italy, and Brazil, and of these Italy had the best station and we the worst. We were started in French with the words: "*Messieurs, êtes-vous prêt? Partez.*" At the "*Messieurs*" the Italians went, and by the time we had started they were three-quarters of a length ahead. We should never have beaten them from the worst station, however well we had rowed. Japan and Brazil were completely outclassed and dropped right behind, while we raced up the course; but we could make no

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impression on the Italian crew, who were rowing well in the calm water.

The Americans and Canadians won their heats, and all the losing crews rowed again the next day to decide who would be the fourth crew in the final. The other crews were very poor indeed, and we had no difficulty in beating New Zealand, which was the best of them, and paddling through easy winners. But it certainly looked bad for us in the final, unless we could regain our old form.

We paddled out from the raft, and the blazing Californian sun beat down unmercifully. The stands were crowded, and wireless everywhere was blaring out in the most sensational American slang. "Here are the London Leanders from Great Britain," we could hear a voice saying through the microphone. "They bring no records, but their smooth strokes speak volumes. These are the same blue-blazered Cantabs, conquerors of Oxford this year for the thirteenth time in fourteen years, come to avenge the defeat England suffered from the Golden Bears in the Olympic finals of 1928. Well, they are paddling on, the beef-fed boys from Britain. The eight-cylindered shell from the Thames is not going to take anybody's wash without a terrific argument. Coach Drinkwater has worked the stiffness of travel from his youngsters' muscles, and there is no prettier eight on the lagoon. . . . And now, boys, here come the Golden Bears. America's representative for the eight-oar champion-



Photo by the Author

BUTZ, THE WINNER OF THE DIAMOND SCULLS, AND THE BEST
SCULLER EVER SEEN AT HENLEY, AT LOS ANGELES

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ship. Oh gee, won't there be a splashing of oars when the great flotilla gets away?"

We paddled on down towards the start. Our little Japanese friends, whom we had beaten two days before, ran along the bank shouting to us in broken English and Japanese. They were very keen that we should win, so that they could say that they had been beaten by the winning crew.

The derelict oil wells, sticking up into the sky in thousands along the beach, gave the scene a depressing look. Every now and then, fish like huge mackerel leaped up into the air, as they were frightened by our oars. We were now getting near the thousand-metre mark, and we eased close in front of a microphone to hear more amusing drivel from the loud speaker.

"Friends, Row-mans, Countrymen, lend me your oars! Have you ever heard of a rowing shell equipped with a telephone? Neither had I. But for a long time yesterday afternoon, I could have sworn there was one in Britain's eight-oared shell from Old Cambridge. While following the English boat in a launch yesterday afternoon I was amazed to hear the ringing of a telephone bell. A couple of seconds after it tinkled these rosy-cheeked English, as if electrified, kicked up a great sprint for about a dozen strokes, and then went back to their first pace. Half a mile later the bell rang again, and again the British Leanders gave 'er the oil. And how that boat jumped! When Johnny Ranking, the tiny coxswain, wants a hard twelve

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strokes, he rings the bell, thus the rival coxswain could not double-cross him by starting a sprint earlier, since he does not yell for the dash, as others do. What's more, in big races the bell is muffled to a buzz, thus keeping the strategy a secret. Each crew has a different signal to start. The English Navy begins rowing as the cox chirps, 'Ready Battle.' The Golden Bears, Kys' gang, start to 'Ready Oar.'"

We paddled on down to the start. Here we were sandwiched in between the Italians and the Canadians. The American crew, which was by far the fastest, had the worst station, and were probably handicapped by half a length. After our race in the heats, we had learned that if you wanted to live with the Italian crew, who were very fast anyway, you had to start on the *Êtes-vous prêt?* We told the Americans and the Canadians that we were very sorry we could not wait for the word *Partez* and were going to start as soon as the Italians did. A rope was thrown out for me to hold at bow, and after a few minutes backing and paddling, all the crews were straight.

We were all watching the Italians, who had been specially warned that if they started before the others they would be brought back. This may have been the cause of our own bad start. The boat lurched and rolled, and we sent up fountains of water in every direction. We then settled down to row properly, and by the end of the first minute we were level with the Canadian crew. The American and Italian crews were

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half a length up. All four crews spurred and spurred the whole way up the course, but though the Canadian crew dropped back nearly a third of a length, we could not make up the lead that the other two had gained on us at the start. If the Americans had had the Italian station, they would have been clear of the other three crews.

The shouting was terrific as we approached the grandstand; the bells began to ring incessantly, and we started a final spurt. Then disaster overtook us. The bow of the Italian crew was almost collapsing, and two carted the bow so that the Italian boat came right across into our station. The umpire, seeing that a foul was likely to take place, rushed the launch up to within a few feet of our stern. Tom, wishing to avoid a foul at all costs, as any kind of controversy in an international athletic contest was undesirable, put the rudder on hard. The umpire's launch had now got so close to stroke's oar, that the wash caused by the bows nearly made him catch a crab, and only with the greatest difficulty could he get it out of the water.

The Canadian crew shot past, the Italian crew straightened out. Lu began to curse and swear at the umpire's launch, telling him to keep away. It was in no way the umpire's fault. He had never seen a boat-race before, as this was the first time that any rowing had taken place at Los Angeles. We were now within a hundred yards of the finish, and started to catch up on the crews ahead of us again. But we had lost too

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much, and the Canadian crew crossed the line two feet ahead of us, with the Americans and the Italians half a length ahead of them. We all felt very annoyed with ourselves that we had come so far and rowed so badly. Though the closeness of the umpire's launch and the Italians coming to our water lost us a good deal of ground, we should never have beaten the American crew. We paddled into the raft and received a lecture from the umpire, who said that if we had won we should have been disqualified for swearing at the officials. But this speech cheered us up no end.

XIII

HOSPITALITY

THE OLYMPIC GAMES were over; we had made fools of ourselves and had been beaten, but even so we would make the most of the dance to-night. The young ladies of Los Angeles and Hollywood had formed themselves into a party called the Young Hostesses. They had, by giving concerts and charity dances, collected funds so that they could entertain the Olympic athletes when training was over and the games were finished. To-night the big dance was taking place in an hotel at Long Beach. We were asked to wear Olympic uniform, and arrived in our white trousers and Olympic blazers. My friend Billy Urmston, who had been visiting his ranch in Mexico, thought that he would like to join the party, so someone lent him a spare blazer and some white trousers, and he marched in with us.

I had often heard details of American hospitality and parties and dances, and had very much hoped that I might have experience of them before returning to England.

We found a gigantic room, with tables all round it, and between each dance a course of some delicacy was

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brought to the tables. As soon as we entered, we were seized by a young hostess and were marched off and seated at a table. I had bad luck, and got pinched by a real monster; most of the girls were very pretty and extremely attractive, so, making the excuse that I must go and wash my hands, I slipped out of the side door and a few minutes later entered by the main entrance, where I was pounced upon by a real peach and led over to the other side of the room, where I could not be spied upon by the monster!

Her name was Caroline, but what else it was I never found out. Caroline was almost exactly similar to hundreds of American girls: she was very smartly dressed; her clothes fitted beautifully; her figure was perfect. It seemed to me that American girls on the whole were far better dressed and far better turned out than English girls. The few I met when I was in America, seemed to be exactly the same, and none of them seemed to have any particular character of their own. They all liked the same things, the same drinks, the same bands, and the same film star. Though at first each one appeared different and, as they would describe themselves, rather "cute," after a few moments' conversation one realised that they were all like so many coloured beads on a child's necklace.

We danced round several times, and Caroline then told me that she had a room upstairs, with some drinks. Since it was a prohibition country, it was thought to be bad form to drink openly, but rooms

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had been hired upstairs and bottles smuggled in with the greatest of ease. All the rooms on the landing had been taken by various people. We wandered from room to room, and drinks were pressed upon us wherever we went.

We had been training for a long time, and I must confess that things became very muddled indeed. Apparently I accepted an invitation to go on a yachting cruise the next morning, but this I completely forgot about. The dance continued, and just how or when I left, I can't remember.

I woke up in my room at the hotel being told that a young lady was waiting for me with a car outside. I quickly washed and shaved. Gradually it dawned on me that we had been to a dance the night before. Outside, I recognised Caroline seated in a big car. "Jump in, buddy," she called, and soon we were speeding away through the streets of Long Beach, and eventually the car ran alongside a big white yacht. We jumped on board just in time. I was soon introduced to the owner and to the rest of the party, some of whom I vaguely remembered having seen the night before, while one or two were other athletes that I had met at the games.

The yacht put out to sea, heading for Catalina Island. Every now and again flying fish leapt from the water. We lay in the bows of the yacht with rifles shooting at sharks as they basked on the surface. Every now and then a steward walked round the decks

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with a tray of cocktails and champagne. The champagne was horrid and frightfully sweet. I suppose it was made of grapes, but it is hard to say; it was certainly alcoholic. It seemed to me that the only difference prohibition made to America was in the quality and not in the quantity of the drinks. I never tasted really good stuff while I was there.

An orchestra was playing, and those who wanted to dance could do so. Caroline, who was an extremely good shot for a girl, lay beside me, and we took turns to fire at sharks that lay basking on the surface. The party grew more hilarious as time went on, and as the ship arrived in the bay of Catalina an overwhelming lunch was served in the cabin. I had already eaten and drunk more than I wanted, and longed for a swim; so while the others went down, we rowed a boat ashore to the bathing-pool. There were little rubber boats and surf boats, and we romped about in the sea and basked in the sun until evening.

That night there was another dance, this time in a private house high up on the hill. As usual, there was the endless stream of drinks, and I was really beginning to feel fed-up with the whole party. A young American, who owned a ranch and to whom I had been talking a lot about big game fishing, told me that he had to go back to Los Angeles and that he could give me and any of my friends a lift. I felt that I could not slip off without saying good-bye to Caroline. At last I found her, and she, too, was fed-up with the party

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and agreed to come. My American friend's launch was more like a huge motor boat by comparison with the yacht we had come across on, and although smaller was a good deal faster. There were comfortable cabins, and most of us, worn out, threw ourselves down to sleep. I woke up in Los Angeles. Nearly all our friends had left, but instead of going back across America with them, I wanted to go back through Canada.

I couldn't go back to England until my income accumulated sufficiently to pay the big bills I had left behind at Cambridge. For a few dollars I got my ticket altered to return by Canada. I was told that if I did not leave Canada in ten days the ticket would no longer be valid. This I did not mind in the least. I knew I could find my way back somehow, and I very much wanted to visit my old farm friends, the Coburns, whom I had met a few years before. A letter had come saying that they had lost their farm on the prairie and were now moving north to Hudson Bay Junction, to start a new homestead of their own. They promised plenty of hard work and good shooting if I wanted to come.

It was a few days' journey through hot, dry country up to Seattle, and a cool sea voyage to Vancouver, where I took the train to Banff. A huge man with a very babyish expression got into the carriage. He sat down and looked as if he was saying his prayers, and afterwards I learned that he was. As soon as the train

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started he took a packet of papers from his pocket and walked up and down the carriage giving one to each of us. As he handed a slip to a traveller he made some pleasant remark. Either he asked if the traveller didn't agree with him that it was a beautiful day, or he pointed out the beauty of "God's handiwork," the mountains, and how puny were man's efforts. He pointed to various buildings that we passed. Some of the travellers poked fun at him, and to this he said, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Others took the slips that he gave them and either pretended to read them or dropped them under the seat as soon as he had passed.

I felt very sorry for him, and when he handed me one I thanked him very much and read it through. I tried hard to show the greatest interest in what I read, for I could see that he was watching my face all the time. The slip contained a jumble of sentences out of the Bible, so mixed together as to be quite unfathomable. I folded up the piece of paper and put it in my pocketbook, and crossing over said in my kindest voice, "I think you are doing a wonderful work; I wish I had time to help you fulfil your great mission."

At this he was delighted and I was deluged with a verbal torrent. This was his own idea; he had chosen lines from the Bible, the lines that he liked best, and had printed them. He couldn't pay the bill, and the printers would not give him the slips until he had paid for them. However, he had found a job, and

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soon his papers were paid for. He had left that morning, jumping on to the train without a ticket, trusting in the Lord to provide. It was not long before the ticket-collector came along. It was in vain that the big man with the babyish face tried to persuade him that he was doing "His Father's business." He was told that he must either buy a ticket or get out. At the next station he was seen off the train, praying for the soul of the man who had thrown him off.

I looked out of the train window, and down below, in a raging torrent of the river, I saw an Indian with a long-handled net. The net was shaped like a very big banana. He dropped the net in the water and let the stream take it down until he could reach no farther, and then lifted it up. I saw the net go in four times, and the fourth time out came a salmon. The river must have been solid with fish for him to have netted one with so small a net. He couldn't even see where the fish were, as the water was so muddy.

Early next morning we got to Banff. I longed to see the National Park, of which I had heard so much. I put my rucksack on my back and jumped off the train. It was a lovely warm, sunny day, and I wandered up the little sandy road towards the Banff Springs Hotel. A man stepped out from the trees carrying a fishing-rod and some trout; I said "Good morning" and asked him if he knew of a really cheap place for me to stay for a few days, as I really had no money at all and wanted to see the animals in the Park.

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"I am afraid there is nowhere," he said. "My hotel is the cheapest, and that is about a pound a day."

"I am afraid I couldn't afford that," I said. "I shall have to make myself a little shack in the bushes and perhaps catch a trout or two in the streams. I say, they really are fine trout you've got. If you don't mind my saying so, that is the best basket I have seen. Real beauties! You must be a great fisherman!" (That is a very simple way of getting on good terms with any fisherman.) As we walked along side by side we talked, and like all true Canadians, he showed no reserve whatsoever. I hadn't known him ten minutes before we both recognised each other as kindred spirits. I learned that he quite often poached the deer and sheep in the National Park, and that he had come from England as a very small boy with his parents and that he now kept a small hotel.

"I wonder if you ever saw my home town?" he said. "Or rather it's a village, not a town; it's a little place called Basildon. My father was a farmer there before we came to Canada."

"Basildon," I said. "Why, I know Basildon very well. My home is Goring, which is only a couple of miles away across the river."

"Well, I never! Fancy meeting someone from Basildon! Say, look here, you come and stay with me and there won't be any bill when you go either; I want to hear all the news about Basildon. Why, even now I can see the village and can hear the bell in the old

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church; I can even remember the graveyard and the tombstone put up to two little boys who were drowned in the river. I remember the muddy fields down by the river, where the snipe drum in the summer and where I used to find the plover's eggs, and the Heartslock Woods and the islands where the swans nest every year. My dad caught a huge pike by those islands and I helped him land it, and I can remember watching the trains go dashing along the line. But here we are, this is my shack."

We came to a neatly built house like a Swiss Châlet; inside were stuffed birds and a fine deer head. A neatly dressed maid met us at the door.

"Breakfast for two, and big ones too. Come in Mr. . . . Mr.— what is your name?"

"Dave's my name."

"Come in, Dave, and sit down and tell me all about Basildon."

But, like all people who have been away from home for a long time, he did not want me to tell him about his home. He wanted to do all the telling, and while I stuffed myself with a really first-class breakfast, he continued in a torrent about the moorhens in the river, and the old ferry, and the grebes that covered up their nests with reed whenever a boat came by; and the big chubs that always lay beneath the railway bridge. Now and again I used to say, "Yes, they are still there." I am afraid that I wasn't always very truthful, but I thought he would like to think that everything

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was just like it used to be. No one likes to think of changes in places they knew in their childhood days.

Finally my host went off to do his correspondence, and telling me what time the meals would be, left me to enjoy myself. I spent three days at Banff and then continued my journey across Canada. I so looked forward to seeing the great Canadian forests about which I had heard so much. At last the train drew up at Arran station and I knew my friend's shack was something like twenty miles north.

XIV

HOMESTEADERS

WHAT SMART CLOTHES I had, had gone back to England with the rest of the team. I had told Coburn what time I should be arriving, and was overjoyed to hear from the station-master that he had arrived at Arran to get new tools, which he needed in building his new log house. Coburn had made a small cart with two wheels, an axle of an old motor car, a few boards, and a seat. He shook me warmly by the hand, and throwing my bag of clothes in the seat, told me to jump in. It was a twenty-mile drive back to where he was building a shack.

Coburn was a typical Canadian farmer. He was tall and thin, kind and hospitable. His father had come from Scotland and, as he always said, "They say, Dave, that Coburn Street in Scotland was called after one of my ancestors." His mother had been Dutch, but Coburn himself, like all young Canadians born in Canada, was Canadian. His wife had German parents, but she too was Canadian, and neither of them ever thought of themselves as anything else.

Like other farmers during the boom, Coburn did not save a penny. As fast as one crop was sold he paid

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his bills and invested any profit either in new land or in tractors or other farming gadgets. Skilful salesmen visited the farmers directly after the harvest and easily persuaded them to buy their particular machine, which they said would make the farm pay double. Of course, as soon as the price of wheat went down, followed by a year or two's bad luck, Coburn and thousands of others were unable to pay their taxes. They owned nothing but land and equally valueless farming equipment. He told me of the misfortune which had led to him losing his farm—how a hailstorm had completely ruined his crop and that a fire the next summer had finished all chance of his recovery. He had been made bankrupt, and had been given a free quarter-section of bush country, which he must clear and make a home for himself. He was allowed to take his tools and horses and received three dollars per month relief money.

“Well, Dave,” he said, “you must help me build my shack before winter sets in. We shall have to work really hard, but I think we can do it.”

It was dark, and his family had gone to bed when we arrived at the broken-down old trapper's cabin that he had temporarily repaired to house his family until his new log house should be built. He had already felled as many trees as he needed to build the house, and we set to work to peel them and drag them with horses and a logging chain to the site that he had chosen. It took us nearly a week to get the logs to the



A HOMESTEAD IN THE BUSH

Photo by the Author

HOMESTEADERS

right lengths and to notch them at each end, so that they would fit one into the other. We lifted log upon log, and after slashing off the knobs and bends so that they should lie one on top of the other with as little space as possible between, we filled up the holes with grass and mud. It took us another week to finish and roof the house, and it only remained for us to cut a door and put in the windows.

One day Coburn said he thought that the grain would be dry now. We heard rumours of farmers collecting gangs of men to thrash. Here was a chance of earning a few dollars to give my friends, and I set off for Swan River, on the very edge of the Great Canadian Wheat Belt, some thirty miles away, to try and find a job with a harvesting gang.

My journey lay along rides cut through the Bush, over fallen leaves and springy turf. From time to time I passed the log house of a homesteader, peeping out between the trees, and stopped to ask if any farmers had been asking for men to thrash. None had, and all the spare men had already left in the hopes of finding jobs on the prairies. They told me the names of various farmers who owned a thrashing outfit, and as I walked on I hoped that I was not too late and that they had not already found all the men they needed.

Towards evening, when the shadows of the trees were lengthening on the ground and overhead the first bats were flitting to and fro, I began to look around

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for somewhere to sleep. I came on a fallen tree and thought that I was not likely to find a better place; so I set about collecting armfuls of spruce twigs and grass to make my bed. I buried my face in the twigs to ward off the worst of the mosquitoes, and the sweet resinous smell of the freshly cut spruce soon sent me to sleep.

A shrill noise woke me early next morning, and there, sitting on the far end of a fallen log a few yards away, with his tail curled tightly over his back, sat an infuriated chipmunk. In spite of the fact that he held a nut in his mouth, he called me all the names he could think of, and I realised that I must be very close to his winter store, if not right on top of it. He ran down to the end of the log only a few feet from my head, and the nearer view so increased his fury that the nut dropped from his mouth. At this I laughed, and he darted away to continue his scolding from the branches of a tree.

Sleepily I got up; all round me were masses of wild raspberries, and while I ate my fill, I saw where a bear had gorged himself and slept among the canes. In the best of spirits I continued my way to Swan River. I had now left the bush country behind me and was going through vast fields of neatly stooked grain. I sat down by a stook to rest a bit, and started to rub the wheat between my hands, and vaguely wondered if there was any difference between me, who was stealing a few ears of a farmer's wheat, and a man

CUTTING THE CORN IN CANADA



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sentenced to jail for stealing a few shillings from the government.

All around me, as far as the eye could see, stretched vast golden fields under a cloudless sky. A strange sound sent my blood rushing through my veins, and there, high up against the intense blue of the sky, was a gaggle of Canadian geese flying south. The land must have seemed to them like a mighty yellow sea, with wave upon wave of stooks like ripples on its surface. I forgot the pitiless glare of the sun which beat down on me, and seemed to see the low green hills of the Solway lying under a soft and cloudy sky, down which murmuring brooks ran to the flat marshy meadows below and out over the mud flats to the sea. It was here that I had first learned to love the wild geese.

I could see the pale green marshes and the muddy creeks into which I had so often fallen, and could almost smell the salt tang of the seaweed left by the tide.

The harvest breeze brought the rattle of a cart to my ears, and along the road came a man driving a pair of horses and singing as he drove. I stepped on to the path and waited for him to drive up. Seeing me, he pulled on the reins and shouted:

"Whoa, Gladstone, Whoa, Richard the Great. You wooden-headed, uneducated son-of-a-gun, whoa, Gladstone! Why to J. H. Mahogany Hoover can't you 'whoa' when I tell you? Can't you see here's a

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guy that wants a ride? Jump up if you want a ride into town," he called.

The next moment I was sitting beside him. I remarked what fine shape his team were in.

"Yes," he replied. "I keeps them well and works them hard. The black is Richard the Great and the grey is Gladstone. When they're good I call them Dick and Daisy, but they know what their real names are and are proud of them. I was always a one for learning myself," he continued, "though I can't rightly say that I have had as much of an education as some folks have; but I've read everything I could, especially history, and I likes to give my horses and children historical names. Where are you from?" he asked.

"I'm staying with one of the new homesteaders that came up this spring," I answered.

"Oh, that's where you're from, is it? A longish walk that. They tell me there's an English college lad there that's been working with the homesteaders. They say that back in England he's the heck of a dude, with all kinds of education, but it stands to reason that if he was he wouldn't be out here; so I guess he's just running a big line of blah. Perhaps you met him?"

"No, I haven't," I replied, "but I haven't been there long. Do you happen to know of a farmer who would let me join his thrashing gang? I am fairly handy with a fork."

"Oh, you want to go thrashing, do you? Well,

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you're in luck's way, buddy. A farmer called Elwin has just written to me to ask if I would come along and bring my boy Disraeli as a field pitcher, but he has sprained his wrist falling off the barn and can't come, and so Elwin will be a man short. He makes his men work hard, but he would never ask you to do anything he wouldn't do himself. He'll give you a square deal all right and see you through."

He pointed to a farm with his whip. "A chap named Ford lives there; that's a dandy farm if you like, barbed-wire fences round all the fields, lovely barns and stables and some of the best horses I ever saw. I expect we shall go there first to thrash. And say, doesn't he feed the harvesters well! Poor man, he had two sons killed in the war and his only daughter is in a madhouse. That's why he looks kind of sad, I reckon. Never mentions his sons, he doesn't. See that smoke over there? That's Elwin's farm. I guess that's the engine getting up steam. Gee up, Dick!"

The horses broke into a canter and the wagon rattled on, in and out of the ruts. At last we turned off down a side road into a well-equipped farm surrounded with barns and hayricks. In the yard was a thrashing outfit. The mill had been brought out after its year of idleness and the caboose was being thoroughly overhauled. A new tarpaulin was being stretched over the roof and the holes in the sides patched up with new boards. A mechanic was tinkering with a steam engine, which was belching forth clouds of watery smoke. My new

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friend, whose name I did not know, introduced me to the boss, and I was offered the job of field pitcher with a dollar a day.

"It is awful to ask a man to work for so little in all this heat and dust," he said, "but with the depression as it is and the price of grain so low, it is that or nothing. Just think that five years ago I was paying six or seven dollars for exactly the same work."

All Canadians are wonderful people. As soon as they have met you they either like or dislike you. If they like you, you are a friend and they will confide in you their troubles and ambitions at once.

"Whoever would have thought a few years ago that I should be in the state that I am now? When I came back from the war my dad died and left me a good sum of money and a section of land. Most of the other boys who had been across the water with me had money to spend and spent it in enjoying themselves, in hunting trips, buying motor cars, and having a good time. Gee, I wish I had done the same myself. . . .

"When I came back I set about to put my section of land in perfect order. I invested all my money in draining the marshy bits, putting up railings, building barns. I bought the latest tractors and thrashing outfits, and what's more I paid for everything right out; there was no buying it on the instalment system for me.

"All went well for a year or two when times were

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good, but during the war every inch of the land had been cropped year after year and had never been allowed to lie fallow; so of course I had to rest it a good deal and manure it, and just when everything was going fine this go-darn slump! The price falls right out of the bottom of wheat, and all the money I have invested might have been thrown down a well. It's all I can do to pay the men's wages and my own grocer's bill. Take my advice, boy, don't you be a farmer, try . . .'' He turned away to help one of the men to tinker with the engine.

I liked the look of the Boss, as everyone called him, for I realised at once that here was a man who worked himself harder than anyone.

''We will be starting as soon as we have got steam up, so you had better go and get an armful of hay for yourself and put your things in one of the bunks.''

So I went off and was soon making friends with the other members of the gang. They seemed to be as cheery a crowd as one could wish to meet. In one of the bunks I could see a fiddle and a banjo, and the spare boots and clothes littered over the others gave the interior of the caboose a homely appearance. Nobody seemed to want the bunk nearest to the door, and as I coveted this for myself, I dumped my things on it and went off to fetch some hay to make my bed.

The engine was getting up steam, so we hitched the caboose on to the back of the mill ready to start, and

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ran indoors for dinner. At the shrill sound of the whistle we hurried out, and were soon under way.

The other field pitcher and I were sent on ahead to cut wood for fuel and pile it by the road-side. Next came a couple of men to clear large stones off the cart track and to fill up muddy patches, in which the wheels might stick, with grass and branches. Then came the thrashing outfit, followed by yet more men to push the wheels in difficult places. Our short journey passed off without mishap, save for the breaking of an axle, which was soon mended with wire pinched from a nearby fence.

Ford, whose grain we were going to thrash, came out to meet us, and my heart went out to this quiet, sad little man, who had so much to sadden him and yet who never complained, and who treated all who worked for him as he would the two sons that he had lost in the war. I hoped that an opportunity would present itself so that I could really be kind to this little man, who unconsciously hoped that his Maker would soon take him to join those he loved, though he obviously never admitted, even to himself, that such a wicked thought had ever entered his head.

He told us that supper would be ready at six, and after a good meal we returned early to the caboose. We lit the stove, and soon we were all singing to the accompaniment of the banjo. We remained talking and singing far on into the night, and then remember-

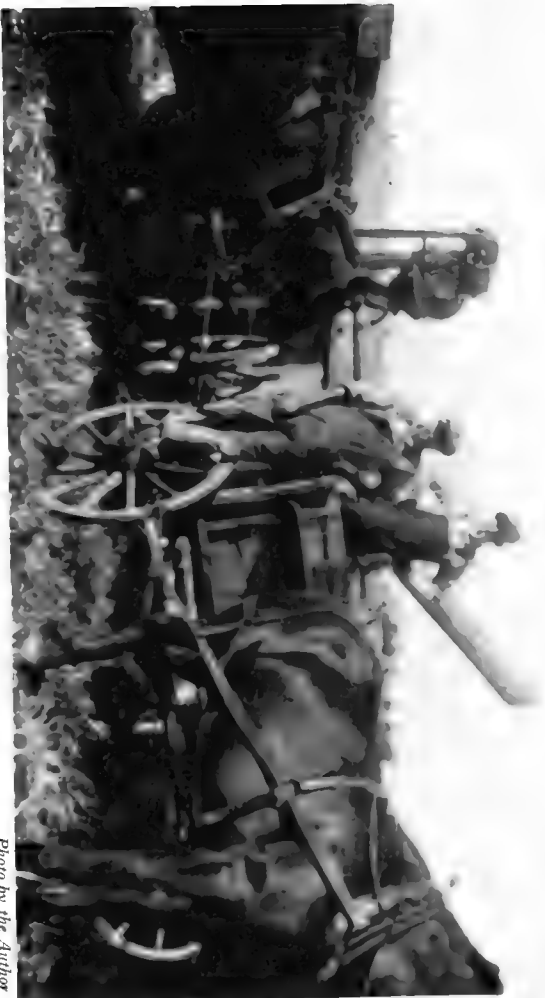


Photo by the Author

HARVESTING IN CANADA : A GRAIN TRUCK BEING FILLED WITH WHEAT

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ing that we had to be up with the dawn, we threw ourselves on our bunks.

I lay in my bunk listening to the snores of the men. I couldn't sleep; I was so excited at the new life I was leading. The hay smelt good. I liked my companions. But farmers' "shop" bored me a little; it seemed to centre on the price of wheat and the number of bushels per acre. All farming talk on the prairies was how to increase these two.

For the first time I did not feel sorry that I had not got a job in the Sudan Civil Service, or, for that matter, in any of the police or other African services that I had tried for, as I should have missed the wonderful time I was having now and meeting all these strange and interesting people who lived in such a completely different world from that in which I had been brought up myself.

I was even more thankful that I had not followed my family's wishes. They had wanted me to go into the army. Doubtless they thought I should look decorative changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace! In fact, being a soldier was the only job that I had turned down. My grandfather had wanted my father to be a Guardsman too, but father wasn't having any either. Everything annoyed me about the Corps when I was at Eton. On a boiling hot day it seemed only common sense to unbutton one's tunic, take off one's tie, and open one's shirt. I had done this, and extra drills had been the result. Who but a lunatic would

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walk along sweating when they could keep cool by undoing a few buttons?

It seemed to me that any initiative or common sense in most of my army friends disappeared at the end of a few months, and their minds were one jumbled mass of Army Regulations.

The snores of the other harvesters kept me awake, and my thoughts rambled on. No; quite definitely I did not want to be a Canadian farmer. It was tremendous fun to come and work on a thrashing gang and visit different farms. The harvesters were in no way like the Americans; each was an individual with a character of his own. True, it did not take long before one had got to the bottom of each individual character, as one's mates had no reserve whatever and one could read them like a book in a few moments. At last I dropped off to sleep.

At four o'clock the teamsters got up to feed their horses, and the Northern Lights were still playing in the sky when we trooped into breakfast an hour later. We were soon in the fields loading the first wagon with stooks.

"Well, what do you think of 'the Alluvial Soil, the Bread-basket of the West'? That's how the Hudson Bay Company agent described this thistle-infected desert prairie to us poor farmers," said the boss, as we walked among the stooks estimating the crop. The whirring of the mill, the well-loaded wagons, and the ceaseless flow of the golden grain gave me a great

HARVESTING IN CANADA : “ READY TO THRASH ”

Photo by the Author



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thrill. We sang as we worked, and the hours went flying by. We went from farm to farm thrashing the crops, and sometimes working far into the night by the light of a burning stack of unwanted straw. When the week's work was done, there was always a dance, given by the farmers whose grain we had milled. It is certainly a great life if you are young and strong.

One day I had a letter from Coburn telling me that work had started on a Government road running near his homestead, and that there was a job waiting for me. The mill had broken down, and so no more work could be done that day. I found somebody to take my place in the gang, pocketed my wages, said good-bye to my mates, and set off back along the way I had come.

I walked all through the night under a brilliant moon, and as dawn was breaking I met Coburn driving the cows into the barn to be milked.

Monday morning was clear and fine. Coburn and I set off early, each driving two of his horses, and soon came to where work on the road was just beginning. The rest of the gang had slept in the caboose by the roadside, and the cook was preparing breakfast by an open fire.

He was a huge, fair-haired man, who had spent his life in the Mounted Police, and when he was pensioned off settled down in a town to enjoy life and his savings. But after so many years stationed in the police posts in the Canadian Arctic, civilisation grew

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irksome; the over-dressed men he met everywhere annoyed him by their appearance and infuriated him by their talk. He longed for the rough hearty companionship of the North, so he had revisited some of his old haunts and had fallen in with the road gang who happened to be wanting a cook.

We drove our team straight into the bush, to where we could hear the ringing of axes and the warning cries of "Timber," from the lumber-jacks, as they felled some spruce or mighty tamarack.

I watched Coburn hitch his chain to a log, and followed suit. He called to his horses and they tugged and strained at the big log, ploughing a furrow through the leafy soil. Soon I was following in his trail. We dragged the logs to bridge a stream. All the men downed tools and came to help us to lay them in position, and we were just about to return for more, when the whistle went for breakfast. Soon we were seated round the fire, with plates of porridge and mugs of steaming tea.

As the cook who was doling out the porridge filled up my plate, his mouth dropped and he stared at me in amazement.

"Sam Hill!" he exclaimed. "If you aren't the living image of Alex! Alex, whom I guarded in a condemned cell, and whom I caught down below as he came through the trap. He was a nice cheerful little blighter."

It sounded anything but cheerful to me, and a hush

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fell on the party ; all eyes were turned on the speaker, and throwing some more logs on the fire he continued: "I felt kind of sorry for Alex, I did. He was a Russian and couldn't speak much English, and he was working with a gang on the C.P.R. line near Vancouver.

"The rest of the boys were a cheerful bunch, always laughing and poking fun, and he kind of thought that they were laughing at him, which they weren't. At last he could stand it no longer and quit. After that he was up in Regina for a spell, working as a waiter in an hotel, but the idea of these fellows laughing at him made his blood boil. He couldn't sleep at nights for thinking of them, and he nursed what he thought was his shame till he could stand it no longer, so he bought a rifle and determined to shoot the lot."

There was an awful pause in the story at this point, and I wriggled uncomfortably in my place, for I could see no resemblance whatever between the blood-thirsty Alex and myself.

After a moment the cook continued: "It was easy enough for him to find the gang, and one day when they were all sitting round the caboose having dinner, he opened fire on them from the bush with a repeating rifle. He was a pretty good shot was Alex, and he got five of them before they knew what was happening. The remaining three made off into the bush, and he gave chase, but couldn't catch them.

"The first I heard of it was when I was cleaning rifles in the Armoury, and a recruit who was on duty

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at the time outside, shouted to me: 'Here, Harry, there's a looney out there. What am I to do with him?' 'How do you know he's a looney?' I asked. 'Well, he says he's just killed five men on the line and wants me to shoot him, and if that's not a looney I'd like to know what is!'

"I got up and went to the door, and there stood a young chap the dead spit of you, and I could see that there was no looney, but that he meant what he said.

"We locked him up and went off to where the men had been working on the line, and sure enough what he said was true. There was nothing we could do for the poor devils he had shot, for they were all stone cold.

"To cut a long story short, it was a perfectly clear case, and at the trial, though his lawyer tried to prove insanity, he was condemned to death.

"I had to guard Alex in the condemned cell. You would be surprised at the number of preachers and missionaries and the like who came to see him and try to save his soul. He was a kind-hearted little beggar and would pretend to each one of them that he believed what they had said and had adopted their faith. He explained to us afterwards that he did not want them to be disappointed and to feel they had failed in their work. Then when they had gone, he would laugh and joke and speculate on what the next one would be. I can remember him saying on the very night before he died: 'To-morrow I will be an angel

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flapping round above the prison. The holy old blue-headed Mackinaw who has just gone has changed my name. He reckons that that will fool old Peter, and he will let me in.' Then he turned to Ted, the other guard in the condemned cell, who was a fine banjo player. Alex was very fond of music and would listen to him for hours. 'When they hang me will you come and play the banjo?' 'Sure,' said Ted, 'I'll be there.'

"And would you believe it when the little devil was standing on the scaffold the next morning, and the Sheriff asked him if he had anything to say before he died, he said: 'Yes, where's Ted, with his banjo? He promised to be here!' The Sheriff told him that this was not the time to be frivolous, for in a few seconds he would be in another world, and repeated his question. Alex started calling loudly for Ted—I was down below, waiting for him to come through, and could hear it all going on. Then the hangman opened the trap and down he came. I caught his legs to stop him swinging, and though his neck was broken I could hear his heart going to beat the band. It was kind of queer, seeing him with a black bag over his head. Poor Alex, I had grown kind of fond of him. It is strange to think that a man who had such a kind heart that he couldn't bear to disappoint the sky-pilots who came to save his soul could be a cold-blooded murderer."

There was a hush that was only broken by the

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scraping of spoons on empty plates. Pipes were lighted, and the silence was broken by the voice of the foreman as he rose to his feet saying:

“And to think that that great stiff, who has just cooked our porridge, has helped to hang men! No wonder nobody wants a second helping this morning.”

The boss, who was a homesteader himself, was greatly respected by everyone, as there was no part of the work that he did not understand thoroughly, from pulling up tree stumps to building bridges. He had no rules as to how long we should sit over meals. “Some days when it is warm fellers like to sit around and talk a bit longer than usual,” he explained; “and other times, when it’s cold, they hurry back to work.” It was an admirable arrangement, and no one took advantage of it to slack.

We all got up; Coburn and I were parted, and I was sent off to drag some logs from the other side of the stream. Soon I was hitched up to a tremendous log, and was shouting and encouraging the horses in and out between the trees. A fallen trunk barred my way, but as I felt sure that the heavy butt of the spruce could make its way through the half decayed wood, I shouted to the horses to go straight ahead. As the rotten wood crumpled under the log, a black and yellow swarm of wasps rose with an angry whine from their ruined home. The next moment the horses were kicking and plunging like mad things. They turned to one side and tried to bolt into the bush. But alas, in

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turning the log jammed between two trees, and the heavy chain anchored them fast.

It was absolutely impossible for me to approach and unloosen the chain, since their flying hooves would have meant certain death. A sensation like a red-hot needle sticking in the back of my neck made me run for safety. A dead bush gave me an idea, and I dashed back to the bridge to get a box of matches and an axe. In a few words I told the foreman what had happened, and sending a man to fetch Coburn, who knew his horses better than I did and might be able to quiet them, I ran back, cut down the bush and lighting it, carried it as near as I dared to the exhausted but still frantic horses. The flames roared up, and the wasps—thinking that a new enemy was approaching—flew straight into them. Soon the men began to appear, and we threw armfuls of green boughs on the flames. Dense clouds of smoke were blown by the breeze over the horses, and the wasps that weren't burned were stupefied by the smoke. I could not help but feel sorry for them, since they were only following their instincts and defending their home.

Coburn arrived, and the horses were soon calmed down at the sound of his familiar voice, and while he held their heads and talked to them in soothing tones, I crept up and unhitched the chain. He led the horses to a marshy glade, unharnessed them, and let them roll on the green grass to ease their tortured skins. It was obvious that the horses would not be able to work

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again for several hours, so I took an axe and started to fell the trees with the lumber-jacks. We cut the trees off about four feet from the ground, so that a good lever would be left for the horses to pull against with the logging chain. The boss was working with us.

"You aren't like a darn fool green-horn Englishman that wanted a job a year or two ago," he said turning to me. "He wouldn't admit he didn't know all there was to be known about lumbering. I guess in the old country he had done a good deal of splitting and cutting up firewood, 'cos he certainly knew how to swing an axe and could hit the same place twice. Well, the boss gave him an axe and told him to fell the nearest tree, and Jimeny Xmas, if he didn't cut all round the tree in a circle. Well, Dave, as you know any of us could stick a stake in the ground and drive it in by dropping the tree on it, and you yourself could drop it within a foot or two of where you meant to. 'J.C.,' said the boss, 'where in the hell's name is that tree going to fall?' And strike me if that darn fool Englishman didn't turn round and say, 'Gawd knows ; I am a wood cutter, I am not a bloomin' prophet.' But he was a good sort and they taught him to fell a tree in the direction he wanted and he kept his job."

"Did you hear what our homesteader said to the parson that comes up here every other week?" continued the boss. "No," I said. "Well, he went up to a homesteader who had had an extra difficult piece

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of land to clear; he had worked hard and now had one or two acres of ground neatly ploughed. The parson stopped to talk to him and said, 'I am awfully glad to see how well you are doing. I hope you will come to Church this Sunday; it is only every other week that I am able to come. You and God together have made a mighty fine job. Well done!' The homesteader was rather vexed that the deity would get praised for what he considered he had done himself. 'Well,' he said, 'God made a mighty poor job of it when he had it by himself.'"

The work went on for three weeks, and then came a letter saying that road work would cease for the winter. The homesteaders returned to their homes with a few dollars to buy food and winter clothing. I asked the foreman to pay my wages to Coburn so that he had a double wage, and told him to buy sugar and other fattening, heat-giving food to keep his three little mites warm in the winter.

I planned a hunting trip. I knew if I could shoot some deer they would freeze solid and remain fresh through the winter for Coburn and his family. As soon as I had had a successful hunt I must think of returning to England, for my clothes had worn thin and I had no money to buy new ones, and I couldn't face a Canadian winter dressed as I was.

XV

THE BUSH

FOR TWENTY MILES beyond the railway line lay new land, soon to be cleared by the settlers. A net-work of rides had been cut through the forest, running north, south, east, and west, leaving sections of one square mile of bush. The most northern of these, running from east to west, bounded thousands of miles of virgin forest, in some places so dense that a man could scarcely force his way between the trunks. "The bush," as it was called, was broken here and there by lakes and swamps, and these were bordered by a chaos of fallen trees.

I threaded my way between the trees, whose boughs were weighted by the first snows of winter, and the padding of my moccasined feet was the only sound that broke the eerie stillness.

I followed the fresh tracks of a deer, peering between the trees into the gloom of the forest for a glimpse of my quarry. After an hour or two the trail led me to a clearing where the marshy ground afforded no foothold to the heavy timber. Here grew long grass, rushes, and stunted willows. I felt sure that the deer were feeding somewhere in the glade ahead. I stood

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perfectly still for several minutes to see if anything stirred, but hearing nothing, cautiously climbed into a tree to get a better view. With a loud crack a branch gave way beneath my weight, and as I clutched another, I saw the rushes part, and caught a glimpse of the antlers of a deer as it bounded between the willows to the safety of the forest.

Tracks were everywhere, and I thought that this would be an ideal place to erect a platform in one of the surrounding trees and to lie in wait for whatever might come to feed in the glade below in the early morning and at dusk. It was too cold by this time to sleep out in the open, so I cut down a young spruce and made myself a shelter out of its branches, and covered the floor with armfuls of long grass, moss, and spruce twigs. I next made myself a platform from which to watch the glade.

I did not expect that much would come that evening because of the noise that I had made chopping the wood, but I waited there patiently all the same, listening to the sounds of the forest. In the trees around me the squirrels were getting in the last of their winter store, and chattered to each other as they hurried about among the branches. A little to one side, where the ground was just firm enough to bear its weight, was a dead tamarack, with a giant woodpecker hammering at its rotten trunk, and as the full moon rose above the trees a huge owl flew noiselessly into its topmost branches and sat there hooting in the

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stillness of the night. For a few moments it sat motionless, and then dived into the long grass, reappearing with a muskrat in its beak. So close was it that I could hear it tearing the meat. Down in the glade below were many scamperings and rustlings as the little people of the forest hunted their food. By this time it had grown so dark that if a deer had come near I could not have shot it, so I climbed down, cramped and stiff from my long vigil, crawled into my new home, nestled into my mossy bed, and lay listening to the sounds of the forest, so silent by day and so loud by night.

I had already been for some time on my platform when the first rays of the sun were lighting the tops of the trees, but though I waited without a sound until the sun was well up, nothing stirred in the glade below. I climbed down, rather disheartened, and visited some snares that I had set the night before. Two of them contained bush rabbits; one had been eaten by a fox, but the other was untouched.

I chose a suitable spot behind a fallen log to cook the rabbit, collected sticks for a fire, filled a pot with water, and taking out my knife, began to clean and skin it. I was just thinking of lighting the fire, when I heard a twig snap, and cautiously raising my head over the log, I saw a little flock of mule deer, feeding down-wind towards me.

Unlike their brothers on the open moors of Scotland, they always expect danger to come from the rear,

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and feed down-wind so as to be warned of anything following in their tracks. Nearer and nearer they came, until they were only about thirty yards away.

There were no good heads amongst them, and if I had not been hunting for the pot, I should never have fired a shot. They were now within point-blank range, and I fired at a young buck, which fell in its tracks. The startled herd bounded off, and I hit two more before they were lost from view between the trees, heading for the glade I had just left. I knew that the wounded animals would not go far, and expected to find the herd in the glade. Soon I was back under the tree where I had built my platform, and inch by inch I drew myself up into its boughs. They were looking behind them to see if they were being followed. The two wounded animals were lying down, one of them obviously dead already and the other looked as if it would never get up again. To kill another was the last thing I wanted to do, but the thought of Coburn and his family overcame my softer feelings, and resting my rifle on a bough, I shot two more before the herd could reach the safety of the trees. I had to finish off one with my knife, but was thankful to find that the rest were already dead. I bled the animals and decided to finish my breakfast before I set to work to cut them up and hang them out of reach of wolves and foxes.

Single-handed this was no easy job, and it was well on in the afternoon as I hung the last haunch high up

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in the branches. To my surprise, I felt a few drops on my face. No one had expected it to rain again before the spring, and now it was pouring cats and dogs. I had been drenched with perspiration climbing up the trees with loads of meat, and not knowing how long the rain would continue, I decided to make for home without delay.

I knew that I must be many miles north of the last ride, my clothes were wet, and I did not want to spend another night in the bush, so taking my bearings from my compass, I ran south.

I ran most of the way, dodging in and out between the trees, and every now and again looking at my compass. I knew that it would not be long before night fell, and I was desperate to reach the ride before it was too dark to see the fallen trees that I had to cross. At last, just as the sun was setting, I came to the ride. I had no idea whether to follow it east or west, and in fact I was only certain of one thing : that I had never been on this part of it before. However, knowing that whichever way I went I was bound to come across a log house sooner or later, and tossing for it in my mind, I decided to run towards the west. I had to go farther than I expected before I saw a light ahead, and, on coming closer, I saw that it was a Doukhobor's house, and knew that anything he had would be shared with me and that I would have a warm bed and my clothes dried for me. The door was opened by a Doukhobor whom I had never seen

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before. He could only speak a little English, but seeing I was tired and hungry he beckoned me in.

Like most log houses, it was one large room, with a sleeping bench projecting from the wall at the far end and a stove by the door on which bubbled a big pot of potatoes. Round a table in the middle of the room, just beginning their supper, sat the Douk's mother, wife, and daughter. The latter was an attractive looking girl of about seventeen, but the mother was a very old woman with white hair who looked as if she would not last long. She had no teeth left, so she sucked the potatoes. No one seemed in the least surprised to see me, and I told the girl, who had learned English in the school, that I had been hunting and had lost my way, and had seen their light through the trees. She asked me where my homestead was, and I told her that I did not own a homestead and was working for Coburn. She interpreted what I said to her parents, and told me that Coburn's house was a good twelve miles to the east.

The Doukhobor piled my plate with potatoes, and as I ate a nice drowsy feeling of well-being stole over me. I must have looked very wet, for no sooner had we finished our meal than the girl asked if I would like to dry my clothes. I stood up, rather embarrassed, leaving a wet pool on the seat behind me, slipped off my coat and trousers, and stood—feeling a little self-conscious—in my underclothes and shirt. It was obvious to the most casual observer that these were

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no drier than the rest, and the girl, who had hung my other things behind the stove, held out her hand for them too, laughing at my embarrassment, while the Douk fetched a pair of trousers. Like most of his race, he was of very slight build, and as a tailor's figure is one of the many sacrifices that a rowing man must make, I knew that there was not the slightest chance of my getting into them. The Doukhobors themselves, who have no shame, would have thought nothing of stripping naked, but their amused expressions at my shyness did nothing to lessen my embarrassment. The Douk held up his trousers, and looking at me shook his head. At last the daughter, who was a fine, buxom lass, produced a skirt from a box under the bed, and slipping it round my waist, I handed her the rest of my things. A shawl belonging to the old grandmother was thrown round my shoulders, and in this outfit I was warm and dry, even if I looked ridiculous.

Unfortunately for me, it happened to be a day of celebration in the Doukhobor world—whether it was a saint's day or a birthday I never found out—and I realised to my horror that visitors were expected. The mother and daughter having disposed of me, set about clearing the room; bottles of home-brew were brought out from their cache under the floor, and soon we could hear the sound of jolting carts and voices outside, as the guests began to arrive. All sorts and sizes of Doukhobors streamed in through the

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door, alike only in their determination to enjoy the evening. I was introduced all round as "Dave," my host explained the situation and everyone laughed good-naturedly at my plight. After a few glasses of that foul-tasting but extremely potent home-brew all embarrassment left me, and I too began to enjoy the party. Most of the conversation was in Russian, but some of the younger people spoke English, and saw to it that I was not left with no one to talk to. Though small in stature, my host was apparently a big man in the Doukhobor world. Strange stringed instruments, the like of which I had never seen or heard before, were produced to accompany the deep melodious singing of the Russians. Four Doukhobors began to dance. They leaped and spun, twisted and turned, and so violent was their dancing that the whole house shook with the rhythm of their stamping feet.

When they fell panting on to the benches, four more sprang up in their place. Bottles passed round, and the party grew more and more lively as the evening progressed. The hours flew by, and it was long past midnight and the fun was at its height when four big bonfires were lighted in the yard outside. The flames leaped and crackled, mimicking the Northern Lights that danced in the sky above, and the whole party trooped out of the house and began to sing softly, songs from their far Siberian homes. At first the tones were low and plaintive, but the character of the music changed, and as the singing grew wilder, the

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Doukhobors began to dance again. In and out among the bonfires the couples swung and circled in a far wilder dance than any I had ever seen before. The party ended as abruptly as it had started, and my host and his family returned alone to the house, from whose open door I had been watching this weird sight.

Bedclothes were laid down on the sleeping bench, and soon I was snuggling down between the rough blankets, next to the wall. A few minutes later the Doukhobor himself came to bed and lay down next to me, followed by his wife, daughter, and mother in that order, and I smiled sleepily to myself at the idea of the daughter being so safely sandwiched in between the two older women. The close proximity of the entire family made me long for an open window and a breath of fresh air, but soon all these things were forgotten in slumber.

The next morning I was wakened by the sound of clattering about the house. I was alone in the bed, and was soon up. A big loaf of sour bread and a pot of tea were waiting on the table, for the others had breakfasted earlier. The Doukhobor had gone out and, as I stood in the doorway enjoying the fresh air of the morning after the frowsiness of the house, I could see him hard at work, clearing some tree-stumps out of the yard. I felt that I owed something for my night's lodging, and set to work to help him. I worked for a few hours, and then, thanking them all

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for their kindness, I set off on my way back to the Coburns' shack.

I felt I was returning home when I saw the familiar figure of my tall, lanky friend swinging his axe, while he dealt the last few strokes which sent a tree crashing to the ground. I noticed that, while I had been away, he had started to make a road towards the big marsh where he had cut hay in the summer; for he now wished to lift the cocks and stack them near the barn. He was so engrossed in his work that he did not notice my approach.

"Hullo there," I called, and at that he dropped what he was doing and came over to meet me, with a smile all over his lean, ugly face.

"Well, you old son-of-a-gun," he said, "I sure am glad to see you back. When did you eat last? You sure look hungry. I don't mind betting that you have been in luck's way in the bush."

"Right first shot, old-timer," I said. "I slept in the same bed with a Doukhobor girl, even if she was between mother and granny. There are five deer hanging up out there in the timber, high up out of reach of the wolves and foxes."

He clapped me heartily on the back saying, "Aren't you just the grand boy, Dave? We sure need meat badly."

"Now tell me about yourself," I said, "and what you've been doing while I've been away. Idling, I suppose, as usual."

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At this we were interrupted by his three children, who came running out, tumbling over each other in their excitement to see what I had got. Coburn linked his arm in mine, and with the children following at our heels we walked into the house.

XVI

HOBBOES

THE NEXT DAY we hitched up our horses to a sleigh and went back to fetch the meat. It was snowing hard, and we had some difficulty in finding our way back to where it was hung in the trees; the moon was shining through the spruce tops when we returned with the meat already frozen solid.

The Canadian winter was fast drawing in, and the snow lay six inches deep on the ground, covering the forest with a white blanket of sleepy silence. The ponds and swamps, where in the summer the muskrats had splashed and played as they worked on their rush houses, were now frozen over; and through the clear ice one could see tracks of the moose in the mud below and the torn-up roots of the water lilies on which they had fed.

As I saw winter binding the countryside in its iron grip, I knew that the time had come when I could be of no further help to the Coburn family and would only be an extra mouth to feed. I had been very happy with the homesteaders and nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to see the long winter to its end, but I knew they would be better off without me

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and I must wander on. So accordingly at breakfast the next morning I told them my intention of returning to England, and thinking no time was as good as the present, I said good-bye and set out on my twenty-mile tramp to the station.

My road lay through the bush, under the bare branches of the leafless trees, which were sharply etched against the sky, heavy with unfallen snow. I heard the slow beating of mighty wings and the sonorous bugle voices of wild swans as under a dark sky they flew from their homes in the rapidly freezing north. Doubtless the open water in Hudson Bay was fast disappearing, and as they passed overhead, they took with them the last breath of autumn.

I saw no other bird, save an occasional ruffed grouse which flapped up into the trees at my approach. Every now and again a cotton-tail rabbit scampered across my path, and once, startled from my reverie by a crashing in the undergrowth, I caught a fleeting glimpse of a doe and her well-grown fawn bounding off among the trees.

The snow was soft and dry, and as I went along I watched the tracks before me on the ground and amused myself by trying to work out what had happened to the little people of the bush, who left a tale of night's scamperings written in the snow, for all who passed to read. In this way the miles slipped by, and as the sun was just dipping below the horizon, I found myself in front of a homestead belonging to a

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Doukhobor farmer whose crops we had thrashed in the fall. He had the amazing name of Lachey Bocker, and was known to the gang as old Lazy Bones.

With one last look at the forest which appeared in the dim light to be pencilled in black and white and countless intermediate shades of grey, I strode through the yard and knocked at the door. It was opened by Lazy Bones himself—a little dark man with a square chin and deep, piercing eyes:

“Come on in, Dave. We sure are pleased to see you.”

A pleasant homely scene met my eyes as I followed him in. His daughter was sitting in the warm glow of the fire spinning. A cradle made of willow boughs hung from a beam by his wife’s side, so that she could rock it with one hand as she bent over the stove and attended to the cooking with the other. In it lay Lazy Bones junior, crowing and gurgling to the accompaniment of the simmering pots—a new arrival since the harvest.

Mrs. Lazy Bones was a fine, well-built woman, descended from generations of Doukhobor mothers, who in times gone by had been harnessed to the plough by their husbands and driven over the fields, as the Doukhobors had thought it wrong to make animals work—it was forbidden by their religion.

“Stay the night, Dave,” said old Lazy Bones. “I am going into Arran to-morrow and will give you a ride into town.”

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

As I was in no particular hurry and all the days were the same to me, I accepted gratefully, for I knew he was good company and I would have an amusing evening. We went out together to feed the animals and do the chores round the farm, while the women-folk were getting supper. Together we fed the horses, milked the cows, and collected a few eggs before shutting up the hens for the night, safe from the jaws of marauding wolves and foxes. On re-entering the house, we found that supper was already waiting for us, and we sat down to huge bowls of vegetable soup and bread, followed by venison and blueberries and jugs of milk. After supper had been cleared away and the women had retired up into the loft, Lazy Bones produced some bottles of fiery tasting home-brew, and we sat far into the night talking of many things.

He told me that he had had a fairly good year, and had managed to sell all his grain before the glut at quite a good price. He was a very intelligent man, with definite views on almost every subject. He had long ago given up his Doukhobor principles, and no longer paraded naked with his family, as his father had done. He allowed his children to eat meat, which until the death of his father he had never tasted himself; and encouraged them to attend the state schools, though all this was against the Doukhobor custom. He told me an amusing tale about the local school-teacher.

One day during the summer a wasp flew in through

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the door of the school and buzzed exasperatingly round the teacher's head. Being straight out from town and new to the school, she knew neither the Doukhobor customs nor that a wasp—if left alone—was harmless. She hit at it with a copy-book and knocked it on to the floor. At once all the children were up in arms!

"How could you kill one of God's little creatures?" they cried, with real horror on their faces.

"But it was just going to sting me, you silly children," she replied. "I suppose you would let it sting you?"

"Yes, we would much rather be stung than kill one of God's little creatures," they said, and the whole class left the school in disgust!

At last we got up from the table and I went out to sleep in the loft above the barn. It was a brilliant moonlit night, with the Northern Lights dancing in the sky. As I stood spellbound at the beauty, the silence of the bush was broken by the lowing of a distant moose for its mate, and the blood-curdling howls of the coyotes howling at the moon. I stood for a moment, and then when all was silent once more, climbed the ladder to the loft and was soon up in the hay.

I woke in the morning with a splitting head as a result of Lachey Bocker's frightful brew, and with difficulty climbed down the ladder, drew a bucket of icy water from the well in the yard, and bathed my

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throbbing temples. Lazy Bones was in no better shape, and had decided to give up his idea of going into Arran, so after a glass of milk—which was all I could face, I set off alone for the last mile or two of my journey.

When I arrived at the half-dozen huts that go by the name of Arran, I went straight to see my friend, the Welsh station-master. He was a kind, cheerful little man with a warm spot in his heart for me as a fellow-countryman. He told me that there was no freight train coming in that day, but that one was expected on the morrow, and he thought that it would be easy enough for me to get aboard. He said that the Mounted Police would probably search the train, as they were on the look out at this time of the year for hoboes trying to get into towns for the winter, but that if I hid behind the elevator and only jumped on when the train began to move, he would keep the police occupied on the other side of it for me.

When the train came in next morning everything went according to plan. The two policemen who had ridden in to clear the train of any stray hoboes searched it, and on finding no one, set off to the station-master's room to consume a bottle of beer. As the train began to move I jumped for an empty cattle truck, and I was barely safe inside when I heard footsteps running on the lines, outside, a hand gripped the door and a brown unshaven face peered in. Realising that this was a fellow hobo, I gripped a ragged shoulder

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and dragged the man in. He lay on the floor panting and laughing.

"Gee, those cops nearly had me," he said. "I was fast asleep, and did not wake up till I heard them searching the car right behind me. I only just had time to slip out and get under the train, where I ran down between the wheels and hid in a car they had already searched. I saw you run out from behind the elevator and so decided to travel in your truck for company. Say, you're new to this kind of travel, aren't you? If the train had been going a little bit faster you would have been under the wheels. Never jump for a train, but run alongside, hold on, and wait till it jerks you off your feet, then swing up. If you jump when a train is going fast there is always the danger that you will get winded and fall under the wheels. Gee, we have got hay and all in here," he said, and soon we were sitting side by side and sharing a loaf of bread which the station-master had given me.

As the train lurched and rolled on its way to Winnipeg, we talked of many things and inevitably, in those days, of the world depression. He told me of its effect on Canada, and I replied that England was in little better shape, though I had just had a letter from home saying that the tide was on the turn.

"But surely though, all the very rich people"—and he mentioned several names and places—"can't have lost all their money? They must go on spending and

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keep things going a bit. England surely can't be as badly off as Canada?''

I was amazed that this rough Canadian harvester had ever heard of these places, in one of which I had stayed, and I asked him with some curiosity how he had come across them.

'I'm English,' he said. 'My grandfather is an English lord, and when dad was young he stayed with them and has shown me pictures of them. He did something awful—what it was I don't know—but his father gave him enough money to come out to Canada and told him that he never wanted to see him again.'

'I have often been told how dad arrived at Wolsey. He got out of the train all toggled up to the nines, with several trunks full of shirts, coats, top-hats and all, and walked down the platform with his spats, gloves, and a walking stick—a real English dude he was. He walked up to old Jimmy, the station-master, and asked for the manager of the Wolsey Mining Company. Jimmy didn't know what on earth he was talking about. 'I guess you have come to the wrong place,' he said. 'There's no mining company here.'

'With a flourish dad produced a letter of introduction from his pocket, and when Jimmy saw it, he burst out laughing: 'Hell!' he said. 'It's only Mac you want to see; he's right over there.' Sure enough old Mac was walking towards the station. Dirt and grease were all over his clothes and he hadn't shaved for a week, and was looking as disreputable as it's

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possible to be. Dad sure was surprised, but there was nothing else for him to do but take off his coat and start to work then and there with a pick and shovel.

“For a few years he made good, and he had a goodish few dollars stowed away in the bank. Then he took to drink, since an aunt of his had died in the Old Country, leaving him just enough money so that he needn’t bother to work again. He built himself a shack near the station at Wolsey, and nearly every night drank himself insensible. I was only a kid at the time, and mother took me away to live with her parents. Dad turned into a regular old toper, and as the years went by continued to drink more and more heavily, until now he is practically never sober and the doctors say that he can’t live for more than a month or two at the most.

“Well, would you believe it, one Christmas several years ago when the C.P.R. express from Vancouver drew in, who should get out on the platform but dad’s father, all dressed up in top-hat, tail coat, and diamond pin in his tie, as if he was going into the House of Lords.

“He asked where dad was living, and old Jimmy pointed to the shack, and then, knowing that dad would be blind drunk, although it was only twelve o’clock in the morning and guessing that this must be his father, he tried to show grandad to the hotel, in the hopes of getting father sober before he saw him. But grandad was not to be persuaded. He hadn’t

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seen his son for thirty years, and knowing that he had not long to live, he had come all that way to forgive him and take him home. Dad's shack was just outside the station, right at the end of the platform. The old man walked straight down, and pushed the door open. Dad was lying on the floor half dressed; he hadn't shaved for several days, the air reeked with the smell of stale whisky; and unwashed plates and dirty clothes lay scattered around everywhere.

"The old man never said a word, closed the door and walked straight back. The train, which had stopped to pick up water was still in the station, and his valet was taking his things out of the carriage; and with the words: 'You can put those things back, John; we won't be staying here after all,' he stepped back into the train.

"Later, when they told dad about it, he just swore and opened another bottle of whisky." The speaker paused.

"I suppose it is quite impossible to make your father give up drink?"

"I'm afraid so," he said. "God knows I've tried often enough. I guess he reckons he's made a mess of his life, and that the sooner he is pushing up the daisies the better."

"Why don't you write to your grandfather?" I asked.

"Well, from what old Jimmy told me, I guess old grandad doesn't know anything about me."

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“Why don’t you write to him then; it would be a good thing if he knew he had a grandson. He might make you his heir; otherwise he will probably leave everything to a hospital.”

I could hear him fidgeting uncomfortably in the straw beside me. “I reckon he wouldn’t be too pleased to know he had a grandson. You see, dad and mum were never properly married.” There was a catch in his voice and I felt sorry that I had spoken.

“Give me your grandfather’s name and address,” I said; “I can easily find someone in England who knows him and will introduce me, and even if I don’t, I could just go and call on him and tell him about you.”

We rummaged about and found an old bit of newspaper in the corner of the truck, he struck a match, and by its light I wrote down the name and address with a piece of coal, folded the paper neatly, and put it away in my pocket. *On my return to England I found no such person existed.* After that we sat side by side in silence, watching the lights of the farmhouses flash past through the open door. I must have dropped off to sleep, for the next thing I knew was my companion shaking me by the shoulder.

“Wake up, the train is stopping—I don’t know why. Get ready to jump out; perhaps some Mounties are going to search the train for hoboos. They don’t want a big crowd flocking to the towns to be kept on relief all the winter.”

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I could see the stars through a crack in the door. I looked out sleepily, and found that the train was already slowing down as we passed through the outskirts of Winnipeg. He pulled open the door, and with his weight supported on his left hand, dropped on to the lines, for a few seconds he ran beside the train and then let go. He shouted to me to follow suit, and I did so with some misgiving. I felt the stones leaping under my feet, and clutched madly at the door, for I did not want to leave go. I loosed my grip and rolled over and over, picking myself up none the worse for wear, and was soon following my new-found friend into the town.

XVII

WINNIPEG

I KNOW OF no more desolate and unfriendly looking place than Winnipeg when seen in the chilly light of a November morning. Now and then, as we went along, we caught a whiff of the fried bacon and coffee of the early breakfasters, and this spurred on our lagging footsteps as we threaded our way through the deserted streets. Then as we turned a corner, my companion exclaimed: "Well, Dave, we haven't much farther to go now." I felt that this was the best news that I had heard for some time. "Mike's place is over there, opposite the sign," and he pointed to a light gleaming in a window not far ahead.

The next moment we were standing by the door, listening to the inquisitive footsteps of the owner of the shop, who was, I am sure, wondering who could be knocking at that early hour. Presently the door opened, and after the two friends had thumped each other on the back, I was introduced.

"Come on in," said Mike; "I can see you boys are hungry." We walked through the shop, between the rows of second-hand bicycles, up a badly worn stair at the back, and into a little room with an unmade bed

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at one end. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate at the other, and pushed against the wall, under the window, was a folding table on which stood bread, butter, and tea. A kettle was singing cheerily on the hob by the fire.

"If I had known that you boys were coming, I would have had something more to eat, but living by myself, I never bother to cook."

While our host poured us out cups of tea, my travelling companion, to whom I had told my story in the cattle truck, explained the situation, making it quite clear that, though I was completely broke, I must get back to England somehow.

"Wait a minute, let me think," said Mike. "Now what would be the best thing for you to do?" and resting his elbows on the table, he was silent for a moment, with his head between his hands, deep in thought. "I wonder if we could get you a job on a cattle boat? I have got a friend in the Saint Boniface cattle market who might be able to give you a job taking a consignment of cattle to Liverpool. They will make you sign a paper, of course, saying that you won't desert the ship in the Old Country, but that is only to make them all right with the Immigration Authorities, and once you have landed the beefs, as far as they are concerned they don't want to see you again. If you can't get off the Docks into the town, you won't be the kind of chap I take you for! I will write to my friend and ask him to do his best for you."

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He went on: "But it is quite likely with the depression as it is, they may not be shipping any cattle. In that case, I think you had better go and tell your story to the mayor. Anyway, don't you worry, Dave—that's your name, isn't it?—you can stay here until we have fixed you up. Winter has officially started in Canada, and if you do have to go to the mayor he can't turn you out of the town, but must either keep you through the winter or ship you back home."

He beamed at me through his spectacles, and my heart warmed to this little man, with his typical Canadian kindness. I wondered if I had been in the same fix in England how many people would have invited a complete stranger to stay with them and gone so far out of their way to help?

After breakfast he gave me a note to a friend of his, one Mr. Macdonald, and I set off for Saint Boniface. It was a long walk and I would like to have taken a tram, but I didn't dare break into my last remaining dollar. At last I arrived at the Cattle Market, only to learn that Mr. Macdonald was away in Chicago on business. I went from shed to shed, but they were mostly empty, for very little trade was being done. Now and again I passed men driving little herds of cattle or standing together in small groups in the empty pens discussing prices. I asked everyone I met if they knew of anyone wanting a man to take cattle over to Liverpool, but they had already booked men for those that were being shipped immediately.

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However, I was offered several jobs for the following month. I could stay with my friend at the bicycle shop for that time, and send the money for my keep after my return to England.

I went back there that night hungry, dispirited, and tired out, and told them my discouraging news. They told me not to worry, but to go and see the mayor in the morning. So on the following day, having shaved carefully and tidied myself as best I could, I set off for the mayor's office in Portage Avenue. It was with no slight misgivings that I rang the bell. It was answered by a tall, thin young man in neatly cut clothes, who regarded my torn and faded Olympic blazer with a startled stare and asked me what I wanted.

"Please, may I see the mayor?" I asked, and my voice sounded thin even in my own ears.

"Will you please write down your name and your business," said the young man, efficiently producing a pencil and writing pad out of his pocket. Then he began to laugh, saying, "I can see you are a College lad who has been up to some mischief. Tell me all about it and I will do what I can for you."

So I told him that I had come over to Los Angeles for the Olympic Games, and as I had wanted to see something of Canada, I had not returned to England with the rest of the crew but had been working for the last few months and seeing life as I had never seen it before. I showed him my ticket, which was long

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overdue, and asked if there was any way for me to get back to England.

He laughed at my story and said that he would tell the mayor about me, and that he thought that something might be done. "Anyway," he said, "if we can't do anything, you can stay with me until you can get the money sent out from home. I should love to hear about the Games and all your adventures."

I liked this friendly young man, who went off and returned in a few minutes to say that the mayor would see me. I followed him into a luxuriously equipped office, where a big, tall man with a frank open face and a twinkle in his eye was sitting. He leaned forward in his chair and held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Haig-Thomas," he said with a broad colonial twang. "I am an old rowing man and I used to row for the Winnipeg Rowing Club myself. Come and tell me all about the Games." Soon I was sitting down in front of the fire deep in conversation with him. When I had finished my story, he touched the bell and in came his secretary, to whom he said: "Ferguson, take this gentleman along to the offices of the Canadian Pacific Railway with this letter from me," and then turning to me. "I think, Mr. Haig-Thomas, you will find that this will make it quite all right. It was young men like you that made this Dominion what it is." And so saying he rose, and shook me warmly by the hand. In a few moments I was on my way to the C.P.R. Head Office, in a very

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grand car marked "Mayor and Corporation" feeling rather shabby, with the precious letter in my pocket.

When we arrived, we found that an important meeting was in progress, as the Vice-President of the Railway happened to be in Winnipeg. Ferguson led me straight in and introduced me, and I was offered a drink while the letter was being read. I had to tell my story all over again to the great amusement of everyone in the room. The Vice-President seemed to regard me as a most welcome interruption and ordered me to be issued with a new ticket at once. I felt how lucky I was to have met him, of all people in the world, on the one day when he was in Winnipeg. Ferguson, the Mayor's secretary, asked me to stay with him until my ship left, but I felt that I had traded enough on his kindness, and determined to make use of an invitation that I had received on my way out from a man in Ottawa. I said good-bye to Ferguson and went down to the station, where I found that not only had I been issued with a new ticket, but the Vice-President had ordered me a sleeper as well. And as I crawled between the sheets in my bunk on the Ottawa express I felt that my troubles were now really over, and that I would have a pleasant stay in Ottawa while waiting for the next ship.

XVIII

OTTAWA

As I PASSED through Toronto I wished I could have stayed with Tommy Church, who had been so kind in asking us to stay on our way home, but I couldn't really thrust myself, in the shabby condition I was in, on the hospitality of someone who had been kindness itself. At Ottawa I rang up William Goldsmith from the station with my last quarter dollar. At the other end of the line a cross, livery voice, that sounded as if its owner had dined well but perhaps unwisely the night before, asked who I was and what I wanted.

"It's me, Billy ; it's David."

"Who?"

"It's David, David Haig-Thomas. Don't you remember you asked any of us to come and stay on our way back from the Olympics? I have got a few days before my ship sails and wondered if you would put me up?"

"Say, I asked you to come and stay when the exhibition was on, but you never did. I'm very busy just now. There is an election on next month. Where are you speaking from?"

"I'm at the station."

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"Then I guess you had better stay at the station hotel. Can't have you at my place. I'm too busy."

"I'm broke. Couldn't stay here if I wanted to!"

"Oh hell! Well, I'll come down and see you. Meet me in the lounge; I'll be right along." And so saying he rang off abruptly.

I walked into the lounge feeling rather dejected that force of circumstances had driven me to ask this bad-tempered politician for his hospitality, and thought how very different he had sounded when he had driven us about Ottawa and posed with us before press photographers and told us to be sure and come and stay with him on our way back. I sat in the lounge trying to read a sporting newspaper, and waited with rather a sinking feeling for Billy to arrive.

I had not long to wait. A few minutes later he slouched through the swing doors and I could see that my guess had been right. He had been drinking heavily the night before. He was short and fat, with a prominent chin and turned-up nose, a bald head and receding yellow teeth. An unlighted cigar was clenched between his sensual lips.

I put down my paper and rose to shake hands. He expressed surprise and no particular pleasure at seeing me. He was very busy trying to regain the seat which he had lost at the last election, and four months after the Olympic Games were over there seemed to him no useful purpose to be served by having an athlete to stay.

"What did you say your name was?"

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"David Haig-Thomas."

"Did you say *Haig-Thomas*?"

"Yes."

"Any relation to Earl Haig?"

"Yes; he was a distant cousin of mine."

"A cousin, did you say? Well, well, say, would you like to come up to my house? Where are your things?"

"I haven't got any just at the moment beyond what I stand up in."

"Well, come on up anyway, and maybe I will be able to fix you up."

We went out of the hotel and into a car, which he had hired for the day.

"It's like this, Dave," he said confidentially. "I am working here for this election, and maybe you can help me. There are several meetings of ex-Service men to-night. Now will you come along with me and I will introduce you to the boys and you can say a few words. By the way, have you ever spoken before?"

"No, Billy, I can't say that I ever have, except on Old Boys' Day at school."

"Well, I will tell you what to say and fill you up with liquor beforehand and give you some notes, and you let them have it. Speak as if every word was an ultimatum."

At this point there came rather a welcome interruption from the driver, who poked his head inside to ask in rather aggrieved tones where we were bound for!

"Drive home," said Billy, and soon we were

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cruising through a busy thoroughfare in Ottawa. The road led us along the shore of the lake and out to a little house nearby standing in its own garden.

Billy jumped out, and led me in. "Had any breakfast?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer he showed me into the dining-room, rang the bell, and ordered breakfast for me.

"Now," he said. "You make yourself quite at home. I'll fix you up with clothes and you can stay here with me and nothing to worry about until the boat goes."

Eggs and bacon were brought in and I was soon eating a hearty breakfast. As I ate, I reviewed my position, which did not lack its humorous element. Here I was staying with a faded second-rate politician, in whose eyes I had nothing to recommend me but my name and on whose hospitality I was hoping to live for the short time remaining until my boat sailed for home. It seemed to me that I had everything to gain and nothing to lose by trying to keep in his good graces and falling in with his plans whatever they might be.

At this moment I was interrupted by the subject of my reverie, who burst into the room crying, "Your bath is ready and I have found you some clothes, so up you get. My wife is away staying with friends, or I would not have dared to bring you home looking like a lousy hobo off a freight train. What *have* you been doing with yourself?"

Giving me no time to answer he led me upstairs,

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talking all the time, and showed me into one of the most luxurious bathrooms I had ever seen. I must confess that I regarded the black glass walls and the steaming bath, sunk in the floor, with unconcealed pleasure. I threw off my dirty clothes and was soon wallowing in the scented water and amusing myself trying all the sprays and showers in turn. After several months as a hobo, here was luxury indeed! On a nearby chair lay a complete set of silk underclothes, a clean shirt, and a dark suit belonging to my host's son, who was away "broadening" in Europe. I hoped that he might be the same build as myself.

"Hurry up," called Billy through the door; "I want to take you to a football match."

As I hastily washed and shaved a barrage of commentary continued through the door. As soon as I was ready he hurried me out again to the waiting car, and soon we were dashing along to see a game between the Ottawa Leopards and the Toronto Argonauts. We arrived at the field and Billy hurried me off to where a little group of important people were talking together in front of the stand. He led me up to one of them and said unctuously:

"Mr. Mayor, I want to introduce you to the Honourable David Haig," and then added in a loud whisper, "first cousin to the great Earl Haig, famous Cambridge athlete, and the youngest member of the House of Commons."

I bowed politely to the man in front of me, and

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hoped that I looked the part in the clothes of the absent young Mr. Goldsmith. I certainly had not the slightest intention of contradicting anything which my host might care to say about me. I would not have minded being represented as the Prince of Wales so long as I could remain in his comfortable house until my departure from Canadian shores, and anyway the humour of the situation appealed to me enormously. The mayor was visibly impressed, so I shook hands with him. I was then introduced in the same terms to a judge, a banker or two, various politicians, and several other pillars of the State. With each introduction I gained confidence and began to think that it really sounded rather well. The bankers had obviously been to a very good lunch party beforehand and were soon calling me Lord Haig, which I found a good deal less embarrassing than the fire of questions regarding procedure in the House of Commons and the policy of my Party, which came from the politicians. Luckily, however, I was relieved from an awkward situation by the whistle sounding for the game to begin.

We hurried off and took our places in the stand, and I for one was thankful to be out of the limelight for a bit. The man next to me began explaining the rules of the Canadian game, and out of my other ear I heard Billy telling everyone that I was also an "All-England Rugby football player"! I was terrified that I should be asked to explain the game, for I felt that I knew

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just as much about it as I had about the subject of our recent conversation. However, like all good things, the game came to an end without anyone asking embarrassing questions, and I was cast out from the comparative security of watching football to the rather rarified atmosphere of an imaginary M.P.

There followed a party at one of the big hotels, where the father of one of the winning team was entertaining the elect of both cities. Billy took me round, introducing me to everyone and then dragging me away before they, or I, had time to say anything. At last, however, I saw one of the Canadian team whom I had met at the Games, and delighted to see an acquaintance who wouldn't ask awkward questions, I slid into a chair beside him. Soon we were filling up each other's glasses with a friendliness that would have taken years to acquire in England.

We were rudely interrupted in this occupation by my host, who gripped me by the arm and said: "Come on, Dave, we've got to go places." I was hurried out without saying good-bye or thanking anyone.

We jumped into the same car in which we had driven about all day. "Step on it," shouted Billy, and we were whisked away to the hotel where the meeting was to be held. On our arrival we found that it was already in full swing. Billy opened the door and walked boldly in and I followed, remembering too late that he had given me no notes. Our footsteps on the wooden floor seemed to drown the words of a short

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man with a red face, who was addressing the crowded meeting from a raised platform at the end of the room. Billy led me straight up to the dais and handed a pencilled note to the speaker. I could easily guess its contents, for the effect was instantaneous. Two chairs were hurriedly produced from behind and we sat down. I tried to look at ease and thought what I would say, when I was called upon to talk. Eventually the man's speech came to an end and he introduced Billy Goldsmith to the men. He rose slowly, took a sip of water, and cleared his throat.

"Say, boys, who do you think I have brought along with me to-night? I could not have found a more suitable person in all Canada. Gentlemen, allow me to introduce to you the Honourable David Haig, first cousin to the famous Earl Haig, youngest Member of the House of Commons, and famous Cambridge athlete, who is staying with me as my guest on his way back from the Olympic Games. I have brought him here to-night to say a few words to you about his great kinsman, whose success he is on the high road to rival in another field. Gentlemen, the Honourable David Haig."

Amid bursts of applause I rose to speak. The drinks I had consumed at the party stood by me. I put myself in an attitude similar to a statue I had seen of Pitt or Gladstone or someone. One leg forward with knee slightly bent, and one hand in my trousers pocket.

"Gentlemen," I paused, "I would like to call you

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comrades, but I cannot. I was in my cradle when all of you crossed to France to fight for your wives and children, your country and the Empire.

"The debt I owe you I can never repay. You forsook your homes, left your jobs, giving all and asking nothing. Many of your comrades were killed, fighting heroically. Though you too would willingly have given your lives you were spared by chance. Many of you that I see here are wounded. Some of you gave your arms, some your legs, and here in front of me I see a man who has lost his eyes. Here I am whom you defended——" and on and on.

Never had I been in such good form. When I saw that the clock at the end of the hall showed that I had been talking for ten minutes I closed down with the words: "I am proud to have spoken to you here to-night." It had gone down well. Everyone clapped and Billy hurried me to the door to shake each man by the hand as he left the room.

We jumped into a car and I was rushed to another meeting, where the same thing took place, and I made an almost identical speech. It was long after midnight when we returned to Billy's home.

"Well done, Dave," said Billy. "You did it fine. You would do well in politics. You told them what they wanted to hear, and not what it was good for them to know."

I had enjoyed my masquerade, but was glad that it was over.

XIX

TO ICELAND

ICE WAS ALREADY forming on the St. Lawrence. This was the last ship that would be able to leave Montreal. Never before had I seen pans of ice floating in the sea, and I made up my mind that one day I would go to the Arctic, where I could watch the floes drifting by to my heart's content.

A tall, fine-looking man came up to me; I seemed to recognise his face, and then I remembered that we had been at Eton together and had even boxed against each other in the final of our weight. I remembered now that it had been one of my hard fights; neither of us knew who had won, but the judge had given it in my favour. We spent many enjoyable hours talking of our old schooldays, and he told me of his plan for an expedition to Abyssinia. I was very thrilled at the idea, and before the ship had arrived in Liverpool I had decided if his plans had matured I would go with him.

I had no money at all, and had with my last half dollar sent a wire for money to meet me on the ship. I had not heard from my family for some time, and thinking it quite likely that some or all of them might

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have gone abroad somewhere or other, I had wired to my Aunt Florence. My wire read: "Am broke. Send money *Duchess of Bedford*, Liverpool. David."

Unlike most of my female relations, my Aunt Florrie had not been in prison as a Suffragette. In fact she was completely normal, without any violent view on any subject, her only vice being that if there was a river of any kind in the neighbourhood she would be in it up to the waist, either with a rod or just paddling about for fun.

To my utter amazement my Aunt Florence failed me. I afterwards discovered that she too had gone abroad and the wire had not been sent on ; so I set out to walk to Goring.

A murder had recently taken place on the road, and people were very shy of giving lifts to strangers. My clothes were ragged, I had no hat or coat, and it would not have surprised me if no one had given me a lift at all. However, several people were kind-hearted, and finally I got on a lorry which was going down to Bedford.

The poor lorry-driver, whom I had met having a cup of tea at a stall a few miles out of Liverpool, looked very unwell. He had had several teeth pulled out the day before; he gave me his sandwiches, which he said he could not eat. He told me that it was against the law for drivers to drive more than a certain number of hours on end, but that jobs were hard to get these days and if he refused his employers would

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soon find another man who would do the job. By the time he had got back to Bedford he would have driven for twenty hours.

I could see that it hurt him to speak, and when I was afraid he was going to faint I told him to change places and that I would drive the lorry for him. I had never driven a lorry before, but felt that as long as I drove slowly to begin with I would be all right. The poor little man was only too glad to let me drive, and sat back with his eyes closed; in a moment or two he was sleeping peacefully.

Hour after hour I drove. On and on until my little friend the lorry-driver woke, feeling better for the sleep, and took over the wheel. We passed his home, and he told me to jump out and said his missus would give me a cup of tea, and to tell her that he would be along in twenty minutes or so. I had a wash and a shave and felt much better.

In Bedford I was able to borrow some money from friends to buy a ticket home.

I decided to visit my old haunts on the Wash and I met a fellow wildfowling, and discovered he was the owner of trawlers going to Iceland. I said how I had always longed to go there.

"Well, if you really want to go, here is my card. You can sign on the boat that goes to-day week."

A week later I climbed aboard a very old North Sea trawler. All the bunks on board were full, but as there

THE CREW OF THE TRAWLER

Photo by the Author



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was always one or two on watch during the night, there was always an empty bunk to be found. People talk of rough seas, of vibration, and the smell of the engines when they cross the Channel, but believe me they do not know what they are talking about.

The trawler had no wireless. A year or two ago she had been on her way to Iceland and her propeller had dropped off; for six weeks she drifted about without seeing a ship, and finally a three-masted German schooner came in sight and the crew, who by this time were very afraid as their supplies of food and water were nearly exhausted, signalled frantically. They were seen, and were soon in tow on their way back to England. Contrary wind delayed them, and it was over two months before they landed. Of course they all long ago had been given up for dead, and a wife of one of the crew had already married someone else!

I spent a lot of my time talking to the captain on the bridge and learning to be a helmsman. We became great friends, and he told me many stories of his adventurous life. By the time the war broke out he had made sufficient money to buy himself a trawler of his own, and by the end of the war the high price of fish enabled him to save several thousand pounds.

His wife was an ambitious woman and wanted to get on in the world. Years past they had planned what they would do when they were rich, and though they weren't quite rich enough to be a "lady and

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gentleman" they decided to have a big public-house, so he gave up the sea, and after giving a big dinner to his sea-faring friends, he settled down to live a life of luxury on shore, and to increase his fortune in the hotel business. He and his wife visited many public-houses, and at last found one which suited both. It was in a good residential quarter, where his wife would no doubt enter into society.

They immediately set about making improvements and alterations to make it the most attractive public-house in the country. His wife had her own ideas as to the decorations of the house; there had to be coloured glass in the doors, new paint everywhere, and a big sign on which was written "The Sailor's Rest." No expense was spared; everything was done up; huge quantities of liquor filled the cellars. It was decided that no accounts or books would be kept—it would be quite unnecessary, and they would easily take the money handed to them over the counter. They engaged servants and one fine spring morning the house was opened. Many of his old sea-faring friends came for the opening ceremony, and it was thought to be a good advertisement to give free drinks, and I gathered that there was no doubt that it was a great advertisement, but that he received his first censure from the police.

His wife insisted that people in their position should have a car, so they built a garage and hired a chauffeur to drive the car. The owner of "The Sailor's Rest"

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drove in front, and his wife and two daughters behind. Away they went in their four-hundred-pound car. They drove through the countryside thrilled with their new toy, and it was nearly supper-time when they returned home. As he got out of the car, he asked the chauffeur how fast the car would go? The chauffeur replied, "Sixty miles an hour."

Now this shook him a lot, it was clearly suicidal to own a car that might dash along the roads at sixty miles an hour. Why, his ship had been one of the fastest in the fleet, and did nearly nine knots. Getting back into the car he gave orders to be driven to the garage. The proprietor of the garage came out to meet him and said :

"Well, do you like the 'bus?'"

"Yes, it goes very well; but I don't want a car that goes sixty m.p.h. and I have come back to sell it. What will you give me for it?"

"I cannot give you more than three hundred for it, as it is second-hand now."

"Done," said the owner of the "Sailor's Rest." The next day taking his three hundred pounds to another garage, he bought a car not capable of doing such high speed.

It was now felt that the daughters, though there was no need for them to work as they would soon be making a big income from the public-house, would like to have an occupation. For some reason or other they weren't entering into society, and their time was

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not taken up in a whirl of parties and dances, so the family drove round the town looking for a shop which would only be visited by the better class of people, and soon they were busily engaged in doing up the shop with the latest improvements suggested to them by interior decorators and builders. The two daughters visited Paris to buy dresses; and everything looked rosy for a most successful business and the family were confident that in a short time a big income would be coming in. They had heard rumours that some shops made 50 per cent., and they were confident that they could at least count on 25 per cent.

The months passed by and he found that he was continually having to draw on his capital to pay bills, and that the income derived from the public-house and the dress shop was negligible. The family became worried, but one day all worries were banished.

Three men came to the public-house. They were gold prospectors who had recently returned from South Africa, where they had found a mine of tremendous wealth, but until it was opened they happened to be a little short. The kind-hearted ex-seaman not only lent them money to meet everyday expenses, but invited them to stay as long as they liked at the hotel.

Now all these men had agreed not to sell the shares of their mine to anyone else; but they were prepared to reward such a kind-hearted man, who, after all,

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was a personal friend, by allowing him to invest a sum of money in the mine. For another month they stayed with him, and frequently made excursions to London to see to the business side of the mining operations. They always had to borrow money for these visits. The time had now come for him to make his investment, which would multiply at a rate almost incredible to anyone who was not so well versed in high finance as his friends.

He drew the rest of his money from the bank and gave it to them to take to London to invest for him. They were expected back the next day, but apparently business matters had kept them in town. By the end of the week there was still no news of them and he became rather worried, especially as a lot of bills had come in and there was no money left in the bank to pay them or any income coming in from the public-house or dress shop. He became desperate and confided his troubles in a friend, who suggested calling the police. No trace of the men could be found, and he realised that he had been robbed. There was nothing now but for him to mortgage the shop and public-house to pay their bills. Things went from bad to worse, and before the end of the year he was back at sea *via* the bankruptcy courts, and his daughters were cleaning herrings at Yarmouth—a job which they really knew and at which they were extremely efficient.

The old man laughed. "I suppose I made a fool of myself. Fancy me, who knew how to handle a ship

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and catch fish, thinking I was going to make a fortune among those sharks on land; of course what I ought to have done was to have invested my money in a bank, and that would have brought in a nice little income. I could have gone fishing or retired in comfort; but now it has gone, the price of fish is low, I am getting on in years, and I shall never again have the money which I would now know what to do with."

It seemed sad that this experience had cost him so much, and I was thankful that my experiences so far had been comparatively cheap.

"But I don't know that I would," he continued. "It's just the same with all the hands on board. We usually come in on a Friday, and they have anything from ten to fifteen pounds in wages. We sail again on Monday and there isn't one man who can afford a 'bus fare to the docks. On the voyage out you hear them planning how they are going to save and invest their money, and become rich men; and on the voyage back the conversation turns to the public-houses and the girls and how they are going to spend their wages. I expect that if times became good and I made money again, I would lose it just the same. Seamen never learn, though to hear them talking you would sometimes think they did."

We steamed up the East Coast and through the Pentland Firth where the decks were awash, and to get to the cabin I had to climb along railings or I would have been over my knees in water.

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A big pot was permanently simmering on a fire. Tea-leaves were put in before we started. Tea-leaves and water were added every day, but never cleaned out, and every man on board, unless he was working on deck or asleep, always had a mug of tea in his hand. It was a bad habit to get into, but before long I found myself just as dependent on my ever-handy mug of tea as the rest of the crew.

We steered entirely by compass and a log over the stern. If strong winds blew the captain would tell the steersman to put her a point or two across. It seemed an adequate form of navigation, and they nearly always sighted the coast of Iceland about the same spot, near the Vestmannaëjar Isles. But more than one captain, though none very recently, had failed to find Iceland and had returned to England fishless and had immediately lost his job as skipper.

I had my first glimpse of Iceland by moonlight. I saw the moonlight shining on an ice-capped mountain, and I vowed then and there that after this trip I would go on a real Arctic expedition and play about amongst the ice to my heart's content. I stayed on deck. Dawn broke; the sea was black with guillemots. I saw my first glaucous gulls. Gannets dived into the sea, and the cliffs of the Vestmannaëjar Isles were white with kittiwakes. Fulmars skimmed the waves. This really was an ornithologist's heaven.

We steamed on to Reykjavik, where a pilot would be taken on who knew the whereabouts of shoals of

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fish, and, what was more important, had inside information as to where the Danish gun-boat was cruising, so that the trawler need not bother about the three-mile limit. I landed in Reykjavik.

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I TOOK THE mail steamer to Akureri. On board there were two German geologists, the Von Schaeffer brothers. They were typical modern young Germans, fair haired and blue eyed, and looked as hard as nails. There were also three Icelandic youths, a complete contrast to the solid Germans. Slim and effeminate, with pale cheeks. There was nothing manly about them. They were over dressed and each one wore a chauffeur's cap, which showed that they were students. In glorious weather we steamed out of Reykjavik. We passed big flocks of eider ducks which were collecting near the islands where they would shortly breed.

The captain, a cheerful red-faced man, strolled along the deck, and pointing to the eider ducks said, "That is where your eiderdowns come from. Soon all those birds will be nesting. They pluck the down from their breasts to line their nests, and after the little ducks have hatched and swum away, the farmers come and collect the down. Of course it needs a lot of cleaning as it is full of broken egg shells, pieces of grass, and sand that has been blown by the wind; but

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after it has been cleaned it is sold to Europe. We sell 45,000 pounds of eider down every year. Some of the farmers are too greedy and take the down as soon as it is put in the nest. The poor bird pulls more down from her breast to keep her eggs warm and the farmers come and take half of this and she has to pull even more. This is very bad for her and for the eggs as they are not kept properly warm. It is like you say in England, 'killing the duck that lays the golden egg.'"

We cruised in and out of the beautiful Icelandic fiords. The snow came right down to the shore, and the first migratory birds were beginning to appear. Flocks of Brent geese passed overhead on their way to North Greenland. One evening we drew up alongside the quay of the little fishing port of Akureri. A few big icebergs were still visible on the horizon, and the Icelanders were very afraid that the Greenland ice was coming down to block their shores as it had done in years gone by.

A very charming Icelfander met me, and seeing that I was a foreigner, asked if he could be of any help in directing me to an hotel. I stopped to watch some skuas chasing a tern. "Oh, you are interested in birds too, are you?" said my new friend, "there is another Englishman here, he is going to Graviland near Heydribrud to look for white-fronted geese."

"What an extraordinary thing," I said, "that is just where I'm going."

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"It's a Mr. Byrd," he said, and I guessed at once that it was the brother of a Cambridge friend of mine. I went into the hotel, and after a short talk and a cup of coffee we agreed to go to Graviland together.

We spent a day collecting things and arranging for ponies to take us on our journey. We rode out of Akureri down the fiord and over the bridge at the far end. Here our guide pointed out some rocks where it was known that the first Vikings tied up their boats. These rocks are now a long way above the highest tides.

We reached the skyline and there before us was one of the most beautiful views in Iceland. Across the fiord were snow-capped mountains which shone pink in the rays of the early morning sun. Here and there rocks cast long blue shadows. High overhead a sea eagle soared in the sky, a black speck in the blue. In the fiord itself the sea was glassy and the reflections were even more beautiful than the mountains themselves. A little fishing boat with brown sails crossed the snowy slopes. A thin mist hung over the open sea and the distant foghorn of a ship echoed in the cliffs. We rode on down the hill through deep drifts of snow. Below us little stunted trees not much higher than a man's head, composed the much talked of forest. The snow was just beginning to melt, and little streams rushed down the mountain sides. The golden plover and the whimbrel had already arrived,

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and on nearly every mound sat a ptarmigan. Cocks chased each other from rock to rock while the hens waited to see which would be the winner.

We passed along the shores of a big lake, and over a rough wooden bridge to a little farm near the great waterfall of Godafoss, where we were to stay the night. The farmer came out to meet us and led away our horses to the stable. Inside a huge bowl of skiah, a brand of sour milk only to be found in Iceland, was on the table. For the second time in my life I ate swan. My old College, St. John's, had a right to have a few of His Majesty's swans every year, and these were provided by the King's swan master for our May Week Ball. They were always cygnets off the Thames, but the swan we were given here was old and tough, but covered with a very good thick gravy. After dinner we were led up to a little room. The beds were let into cupboards in the wall, and a big eiderdown bag was the only covering. My long day's ride had made me very stiff and sore, and it was very slowly that I got into bed and pulled the eiderdown over me.

The next day we came to Myvatn, where the ducks had come in all their thousands. Flocks of long-tailed ducks chased each other up and down the shores. Red-necked phalaropes ran about on the road within a few feet of us. Arctic terns almost deafened us with their cries, and a flock of wild swans came flying down from the hills, with their wings outspread and

DUCKS ON LAKE MYVATN IN THE EVENING

Photo by the Author



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their necks thrust forward. They pitched into the lake. For a moment or two they sat with heads upright, looking around for any danger, and then one by one their heads went down and their tails came up as they plucked the new weed which was beginning to grow on the bottom of the lake. We found it was too late to cross the lake in a boat and so pitched our tent on its shores. Heydrebread was still two days' ride away.

Flocks of wild geese were known to nest at the head of a little river called the Linda. A farmer had visited the place, but no one knew what kind of geese they were. Some people said they were brents, others that they were white-fronted, but it seemed most likely that they were pink-footed, which had been found two years before in another valley. We crossed the lake and rode on on fresh ponies over desert-like country, where there were big blocks of sulphur lying round about, strange holes going into the ground and emitting a smell not unlike a chemist's shop. We rode all day and came to a huge flooded river. The water was creamy-grey from the melted snow. We took the saddles and bridles off our ponies and put them into an old wooden boat which was used as a ferry. The farmer then drove the ponies into the water and rowing behind them, encouraged them until they came to the other shore.

Two days later we came to the most picturesque little Icelandic farmhouse built of turf and old grey

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beams cut from logs that had drifted across the Arctic Ocean from the great Siberian forests. We had been led to believe that the geese nested quite close, but we now found that it was nearly a day's journey, and that we must cross the Yugoslav. Edward Byrd and I thought that four days would be enough to investigate the goose colony, and so, buying enough food for that time, we set out once more. The farmer had agreed to take us to the Yugoslav and leave us on the opposite bank. He would then return on the fifth day. The boat that we were to cross in was even older and more battered than the previous one. We loaded the boat with our tents, food, and cameras and crossed over. The current was very swift. Here and there boulders stuck out of the river and white water broke on either side of them. The river must have been a hundred yards broad, and before we could reach the opposite shore we had been carried a long way down. It was then too late to go farther, the farmer shook our hands, wished us good luck and returned to the farm. He did not like leaving us alone as not long before four men who had visited a lake with a rubber boat had met with a fatal accident.

What actually happened no one will ever know, but of the four men, only one was ever seen again, and he was found by the farmers, a raving lunatic, unable to tell what had happened. Though a careful search was made along the shores of the lake, no part of the boat, paddles or bodies was ever found. The Icelanders,

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who usually have vivid imaginations, tell many different stories. The best is that three men went out in the boat and one walked along the shore, and that hearing a strange noise he looked round to find that his friends, the boat, and the lake, had all completely disappeared. Others say that Necus, the local Loch Ness Monster, that is supposed to inhabit the lifeless lakes in the interior, had claimed three more victims.

Here Icelandic imagination is far below standard. The biggest and most frightening animal in Iceland is an Iceland pony, and folklore is unable to conceive anything more fearsome. His hoofs are turned round the wrong way, so that when he runs forward his tracks look as if they were running backwards. I once asked a farmer if anyone had seen the Necus. "Yes," he said. "Once there were five children playing by a lake, around which were many footprints of ponies which led in and out of the water. It was one of those lakes where there are no fish. The monster had devoured all the trout. Suddenly out of the lake came the Necus. The first thing the children saw was the head appearing above the water. Then he swam ashore and shook himself. 'Wouldn't you like to come for a ride on my back?' said the Necus.

"He was much bigger than an ordinary pony, and there would have been room for all five on his back. Four of the children climbed on at once, but the fifth one shouted 'No, you are Necus.' Now there are two ways of driving away the monster, either to show

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him a bible or to mention his name; very often you have only to mention a word with an N in it. As soon as he heard his name, Necus plunged into the lake with the four children, none of whom were ever seen again. The fifth, who saw it happen, ran home and told the tale."

It was too late to go farther that night, and the next day Edward and I set out to find the geese, but though we searched everywhere, we found only two nests of the pink-footed goose. We returned to our tent. We did not wish to wait four days till the farmer came to fetch us, and eventually we decided to swim across. Since then I have learnt that the only way to swim in very rapid water is to keep the legs vertically underneath, and only try to cross the current at an angle of 45° . Otherwise, swimming with the legs near the surface, across white swirling water, which here and there is breaking in white waves, one's head is bound to go under sometimes. We had to keep our boots on, owing to the sharp lava which we might touch in any of the shallows. We also had to swim in our clothes as we had a long walk to the farm on the other side.

We waded out into the stream and were soon swept off our feet. Luckily for us the river was very broad and there were many shallows on which we could rest. When I was three-quarters of the way across my head went under two or three times. I swallowed a mouthful of water. The white water was breaking

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over my head and I began to think I should never reach the opposite shore. The current swirled me in near a point, and with a few last despairing strokes I grasped a rock. My fingers slipped and my head went under again. My feet touched the bottom and I spun round in a whirlpool. I felt my hands touch a rough rock, and with a desperate effort I clung on and dragged myself up on to the shore, where I lay panting and gasping, and coughing up water. I did not see Edward reach land, but he too told me it was touch and go. Together we walked to the farm. The farmer couldn't believe it was possible to cross the Yugoslav except in a boat, owing to the force of the stream, and the coldness of the water.

The farmer's wife came in to lay the table. She was dressed in the old costume, one of the few remaining relics of bygone times, which the people themselves believe to be really Icelandic. As a matter of fact it is a copy of the last Paris fashion to reach Iceland before a period of great depression. The polar ice came down from the north and blocked the ports, and a big volcanic eruption destroyed farms and live stock. Poverty and starvation devastated the country, and so as no new fashions came from abroad, this costume remained.

From now on Edward's and my plans differed. He wanted to visit the North East, where he hoped to find knots and sanderlings breeding, and I wanted to photograph the ducks near Myvatn. So the next day

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we parted after a most enjoyable time. I was very sorry not to have him with me as I found him a most delightful travelling companion.

I stopped at Myvatn, and staying at the same farm as myself was an English boy by the name of Robinson. He had brought a gun with him and was hoping to collect bird skins. He was unaware that he would be unable to take them back to England. Although I told him that bird skins could only be imported by the Natural History Museum, he continued to shoot, thinking that he would be able to smuggle them in somehow. So I left him, feeling rather annoyed that he should shoot so many birds which would only be wasted.

I thought no more about him, and set about trying to get as many photographs as I could of the ducks. Of these I particularly wanted to photograph the harlequin. Harlequins can only be found where the current is strong, so I left the lake and walked down the river. For several days I tried in vain, but one day, quite close to a farm, I saw two harlequins sitting in the water, drifting here and there in the current. Surely, I thought, these birds should be tamer than most for they have lived near a farm and so should be used to the sight of human beings. However, on seeing me they started to swim away. I had found before that if I imitated the actions of an animal feeding, birds were often reassured. Most birds have a good deal of common sense. They can tell the difference

HARLEQUINS ON THE LAXÁ RIVER, ICELAND

Photo by the Author



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between grazing and meat-eating animals, and know that the former will not eat ducks. I crawled towards them on all fours and tore up grass with my teeth. The harlequins watched, and presumably thought that I was a strangely shaped sheep. They continued to preen and occasionally picked off the flies that floated past them.

Gradually I grew nearer and nearer, quite unconscious of anything but my quarry, and I did not notice a little girl watching through a window from the farm. She rubbed her eyes. Could she believe what she saw? An Englishman, more mad than any she had ever heard of, crawling on all fours and eating grass like a sheep. In terror she called her mother. At first the good lady refused to believe the story. At last she was persuaded to look out of the window. Yes, Thorhilda was telling the truth. There was the Englishman. There was no doubt that he was eating grass. She called her husband and all three watched from the door.

I could not get any nearer to the harlequins owing to the softness of the ground and the fear that my camera would get wet. I was still too far off to photograph them, but I had one trick left which I hoped might decoy them towards me. It is a well-known trick among bird photographers and is often used as a last resort. I lay on my back and kicked my legs in the air as if I were pedalling a bicycle. The harlequins, which are very inquisitive birds,

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immediately swam towards me. I stopped, I did not want them to lose interest, but as soon as they stopped I continued the performance.

Now the birds in the stream were out of sight of the farmhouse. Even if they had been in view, the farmer and his family, who were ignorant of the methods of bird photographers, would scarcely have thought this action sane. He discussed the situation with his wife. What should they do? There was a lunatic on their ground, surely they were responsible, and should do something. Perhaps he would hurt himself, or commit suicide or perhaps he was homicidal and might attack somebody. Suddenly his wife had an idea. An hour ago she had seen the doctor riding on a pony towards a farm where a neighbour was shortly expecting a baby. It was on the telephone, she would see if he could come and help. In a few moments she was talking to the doctor. Yes, he could come, the baby had arrived and everything was going as well as it could, but they must immediately telephone to the British Consul. Fortunately it was not at a time when he could be rung up, and the doctor mounted his pony, and taking with him two strong men, in case I proved a difficult customer to handle, set out in all haste. Meanwhile the harlequins refused to come as close as I wished. After noticing which stone they usually sat on, I focused my camera on this point and attached a long line to the release. I retreated over the hill top and lay down to wait. The doctor arrived and was

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE DUCK AND THREE BABIES

Photo by the Author



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told that the mad Englishman, after eating quantities of grass had stood on his head and waved his legs in the air. He had then tied a box on the end of a long string and left it down by the water, and he was now sleeping peacefully not far away. Then the four of them, armed with rope in case it was necessary to tie me up, came towards me. Hearing footsteps I looked round and then recognised the doctor at whose house I had once had coffee. I sprang to my feet. The three farmers immediately stopped.

"Hello, Mr. Sigidurson," I said, holding out my hand.

We shook hands. I appeared sane enough to the doctor, and not knowing what to say he asked me to come and have coffee in the farm. When the farmer's daughter saw I was coming she gave a scream and ran away to hide in the barn. It wasn't till some time later while eating cakes and drinking coffee that the doctor told me the story. He explained the situation to the farmer, who then appreciated the joke as much as I did, and from that day on we became firm friends. He showed me places and helped me build hides from which I took all my photographs. After coming into several hides with me, he has now become an enthusiastic ornithologist, and every year rings large quantities of ducks and terns.

I had now photographed harlequins, longtails and barrow's goldeneye, perhaps the most beautiful of all ducks. The captain of the ship had roused my

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curiosity to see a big eider duck farm working, and as I very much wanted some pictures of eiders, I went to stay at a well-known farm on the coast. Nearly every farm in Iceland is connected by telephone. The roads are bad, and in consequence farmers are always ringing each other up to exchange the news.

"Do you know an Englishman called Robinson?" asked the farmer after a long conversation.

"Yes, I met him at Myvatn."

"Well, he's going to be tried, but I think he will get off."

"Why, what has he done?"

"Well, I will tell you what a farmer has just told me on the telephone. Mr. Robinson was staying there. He had his dinner and went to bed. He asked for some milk to be brought to him and the farmer took it himself, and he noticed that the gun was in the corner of the room near the door. A sheep and two lambs were grazing just outside the window, and in the morning when the farmer came back, Robinson's gun was by the window and outside were two dead lambs full of shot holes. The farmer could speak no English so was unable to ask Robinson what had happened. He telephoned for the Sheriff, who sent police to investigate. When the police arrived, Robinson tried to prove that the holes in the sheep did not correspond to the size of the shot in his cartridges."

I afterwards discovered that he got off on the strength of this.

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I had always longed to see an eider duck farm, and by the number of pounds of down the farmer sold annually there must have been 10,000 eiders nesting there. I spent several days lying in hides taking photographs of the eider ducks. The farmer told me he had once been visited by a woman who was connected to the English R.S.P.C.A. She arrived in a motor car and harangued him for fully twenty minutes on the cruelty of his farm. How could he be so cruel as to kill and skin the poor little eider ducks for their down, and whenever he opened his mouth to try to explain that he had never killed an eider duck in his life she merely shouted louder? Never once did she allow him to tell her the real truth, and finally, slamming the door in his face, she ordered the chauffeur to drive away.

"You must think my countrymen are very awful," I said, "what with shooting lambs, and ladies like the one you were just telling me about."

The farmer laughed. "I know that all English people are not like them. The people from your country seem to be either the best or the worst. There seems to be no happy medium."

The next few days I explored the farm. The eider ducks nested on willow-covered islands in a freshwater lake. Probably more by luck than foresight they shared these islands with vast numbers of Arctic terns. The terns were so numerous that no raven or black-backed gull dared show his beak in the vicinity. A

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small tern colony can easily be raided by a party of ravens or blackbacks. One bird first flies over the ternery and decoys the terns away while its pals feed on the eggs. Later he has his turn, while the others deal with the birds. This colony was so huge, it stretched for over a mile, that this game could not be played, and so the eider ducks and the terns nested in peace.

Eider ducks themselves suffer from the terns, who are never quite certain that a big fat duck might not rather appreciate a tern's egg, and it is amusing to watch an old eider duck leave the safety of the dwarf willow scrub, where her nest lies hidden, and waddle as fast as she can to the water, ducking her head continually to avoid the pecks of the terns who leave their nests to chase her. On reaching the water she dives immediately and is then left in peace. Terns seem to enjoy chasing the fat old ladies and will leave their nests some way off to join in mobbing an old duck. I once saw a baby duckling which had lost its mother pecked to death by the terns. I went to rescue the poor little mite, but there were such wounds on the back of its head that it died in my hand.

As soon as the eider ducks have left their nests, harvesters set off for the eider duck islands in long boats with high pointed ends—a relic of the old Viking design. These people have collected down for many years, and their task is an easy one as the eiders nearly always nest in the same place as they did

EIDER DUCKS ON THE SEA SHORE

Photo by the Author



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the year before. After the down is collected it is put in piles near the farmhouse and left to dry in the sun. At night, and at the first sign of rain, it is collected under tarpaulins. As soon as it is dry it is cleaned by hand, pieces of broken egg shell and grass are carefully removed. The eider down is then packed in boxes ready to be sold.

As soon as the ducklings are hatched they spend a day or two in fresh water, and then their mothers take them to the sea. Three or four ducks collect together. Sometimes a drake accompanies the family. Many ducklings get lost, and if they are lucky, attach themselves to another family before they die of cold, or stray far enough from the terns to fall a victim to the gulls. The way to the sea is not easy. There is a big waterfall between the colony and the sea, and the foolish mothers forgetting that the ducklings cannot fly, swim to the top of the fall and then, getting frightened, try to swim against the stream. If every duckling is swept over, the mother will usually fly to the bottom and pick up one or two, but if five of her six ducklings go over she will remain with the one at the top of the fall. There is still a fairly good chance that they will be adopted by a mother who has already lost her ducklings and is looking for more.

Their life on the shore is a happy one. They soon grow too big to be brooded by their mothers but they huddle together on the dry shingly beach, making frequent expeditions to fill their tummies with the

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delicacies to be found in the sea. I once counted seventeen eider ducks all trying to mother one duckling.

One evening a telegram came for me from Wilfred Thesiger, asking me to return at once and go to Abyssinia.

It was three days to Reykjavik, where we had to spend another twenty-four hours. While there I had tea with Mr. Magnus Bjornnsson, the curator of the museum. He was hanging up some red deer heads. "Look what has been sent me from the Black Forest. They have been nearly a year in the Customs. Nearly a year ago the Customs informed me that there were some horns for me from Germany. I said I would pay what was due and they said they would let me know. Month after month went by and though I continually called at the Customs Office they couldn't make up their minds what to do about it, and at last this morning I got this letter: 'Some antlers of Reindeer or of some other horned animal have been sent you from Germany. As we can find no law against importing the said antlers, we hope you will call for them at your earliest convenience.'"

I was impatient to get back to England and prepare for my new adventure. At last the ship was ready to sail. She had loaded her hold with several hundred barrels of herrings, and with much hooting, we pulled up anchor and the lights of Reykjavik faded in the distance.

XXI

HYDE PARK

A WEEK LATER I met Wilfred in London and stayed there buying tents and rifles for our trip. At the end of the week I started to walk over to Paddington to catch the evening train down to Goring.

London was misty and mild. I wandered through the Park wondering what Abyssinia would be like. Near the Marble Arch I saw a crowd standing round a man on a soap box and as I passed by I caught the word "Canada." I stopped to listen. Apparently the gentleman on the box had tried everything to make an honest living. Everyone had been against him. He certainly had the gift of the gab. He paused for a moment and continued with the words: "Then I went to Canada—I spent my last ten pounds on a ticket to the Colonies." He had apparently seen that you could get to Canada for ten pounds, on some advertisement, but I knew perfectly well that that was not so.

"I went to Winnipeg," he said, and paused to let that astounding news sink in. "In Winnipeg they told me of big wages I should earn and that harvesting in Canada was a man's life. I am not one to shirk hard work. I was told in Winnipeg that a job would

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be waiting for me in the harvesting gang in Vancouver, and away I went across Canada."

I quite realised by now that he had never been to Canada. There was no harvesting at all in Vancouver. I listened for a few more minutes and realised that the chance that anyone in the crowd had worked on a harvesting gang in Canada was nil, and if I did not spill the beans he would do well out of them. He had just come to the time when he was going to pass round the hat. Hadn't he tried his utmost to get a man's job? Was it his fault that no one would employ him? etc., etc., and after one of his sensational pauses, I asked him if when he went out he had gone through the new tunnel through the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver. He replied, "Yes," and I said, "Well, there isn't a tunnel." At this the crowd laughed and a voice from beside me said:

"Have you been out there, young sir?"

"Yes," I said. "I have just come back; and this man has no more been to Canada than he has been to the moon!"

"Come on, tell us abart it," came a voice from somewhere else. "Yes, let's hear what the young toff 'as to say."

I had had a double sherry at the "Travellers" and the good work that it had done was still with me or I would never had dreamt of doing what I did. I climbed up on to the box and delivered an imperial speech. I may have painted the farm life rather a rosy

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colour, but I was feeling in such good form I couldn't help it, and I finished by saying that I was going back to Canada as soon as I could and advised all of them to go too.

I felt a touch on my shoulder and there was the weirdest little man I had ever seen. He wore a black hat and long side-whiskers and a floppy tie which I had only seen before in caricatures of artists. He had a thin beaky nose, prominent chin, and a sallow complexion. He undoubtedly had a certain amount of Jew in him.

"Have you got a sixpence in your pocket?" he said to me.

"Well, I have as a matter of fact, but what is that to do with you?" By the tone of his voice it was quite certain that he was not going to ask for money.

"It's interesting," he said. "My father always told me that you never saw a man speaking in Hyde Park who had a tanner in his pocket."

"Well, I am the exception that proves the rule," I said.

"What made you get up and speak like that?" he continued.

"I really don't know. I just felt I'd like to. I couldn't resist showing up that idiot standing there telling a pack of lies."

"I have just come out of prison for blasphemy," he said. At this I was taken aback and said, "Bad luck."

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"Yes, come and have a cup of tea with me and we will talk it over," he said. And so this weird creature and I wandered off to a tea-shop. We ordered two teas and some toast and butter. Apparently I was not going to be stung with the bill, though why on earth he wanted to talk to me I couldn't understand, and why I had gone with him I really didn't know. I waited for him to speak.

"Yes," he said, "a week ago to-day I came out of prison. I was arrested for speaking my mind; I got over-excited and said what I ought not to have. It was one of the usual Salvation Army Meetings," he said; "a man was preaching and there were lots of down-and-outs listening. He gave them an address of a Salvation Army hostel and told them there might be room for a bed and breakfast, but that first there would be service. Well, most of the chaps went straight off to the hostel and asked for a bed. They were told that it was full up, and that they were sorry that they could not give them a cup of tea and some bread and butter, but there was a service being held and perhaps they could find spiritual comfort by going to listen.

"Now I knew the ropes and I knew perfectly well that they would watch and that the ones who went to the service would be given a bed afterwards. I felt sorry for those poor miserable wretches who did not know what I knew and had gone off to look for somewhere else to sleep and something to eat. All of a

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sudden I got the impulse to say what I have been sent to prison for saying. I stood up quite near to where the service was going on and talked louder than the Salvation Army officer. Most of the crowd stood by me and I could see most of them were down-and-outs, loafers, and unemployed who had nothing better to do.

"I pointed a finger at the Salvation Army officer and said: 'He will tell you that God loves you, that you are His children, that even the hairs of your head are numbered. Yet here you are without anywhere to sleep to-night. Well, if that is the kind of father God is, I say damn Him and blast Him.' Unfortunately, there was a policeman quite close. I hadn't really meant to say those words. The next thing I knew I was being led off to the police station."

By this time the tea had arrived; I could quite imagine this little man, with his hot dago blood, getting excited and saying what he didn't mean.

"Don't ever get carried away and say what you don't mean," he continued. "Take a lesson from me that has been caught once and has paid the penalty."

I hoped I should soon learn why he had asked me to have tea with him and talk to him, but I was to be disappointed. He pulled some money out of his pocket and called the waitress. "You and I are like ships that pass in the dark, we see each other's lights and we pass on each our own way. Who knows, perhaps we shall meet again? Good-bye, my friend, good-bye." And saying this he walked away.

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I walked on to Paddington—it was quite dark. What strange and interesting things happen to people in dull and uninteresting places. I had enjoyed my evening immensely, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for the people who miss so much fun by not doing what they happen to feel like, and who never talk to people unless they look respectable.

XXII

ABYSSINIA

THE HAWASH RIVER flows into the Danakil Desert. There it disappears, no one knows where or how. Possibly it ends in big swamps. These might prove to be a breeding-place of the locusts, which migrate into the Sudan and Egypt, doing untold damage. The object of the expedition was to follow the river, discover its secrets, and collect news of locust migrations from the natives.

Like all expeditions, we were very hard up, and to economise we travelled third to Djibouti. The Mediterranean was delightful, and we lay and basked in the sun. At Port Said a great many natives joined the ship and the heat became unbearable. A slow following breeze prevented the least draught from entering the port-holes and intensified the heat.

While we were strolling on deck Wilfred looked up and saw the son-in-law of the Emperor, Ras Desta, who had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was now returning to Abyssinia. We hid ourselves behind the nearest boat, as we did not wish the Ras and his followers to see us travelling third.

Wilfred's father had been British Minister in Addis

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Ababa; he himself had spent many years there, and knew that it would affect our prestige with the natives if we were seen by Ras Desta's servants. It was essential that our prestige should be high if we were to accomplish our difficult journey down the Hawash.

There were only two other white men travelling third; the rest were all coloured. It was too hot to sit on deck. I spent most of the time in a cold bath, and my knees and face, which protruded out of the water, were covered with beads of perspiration. However, all bad things come to an end, and early one morning we dropped anchor in Djibouti harbour. The sun had not yet risen and the sullen shores of Africa were half hidden in a morning mist.

A motor-boat came alongside, and in it I recognised an acquaintance of my Cambridge days. He told me he was being employed by a trading company and it was his duty to know the contents of the trains that went to Addis Ababa twice a week. The most interesting thing I learnt was that a million rounds of rifle ammunition was imported every week. It seems that the Emperor must have been preparing for the Italian war that was soon to break.

There wasn't a train going to Addis Ababa for two days, so we stayed in the hotel, which was clean and cool, and seemed like heaven after the inferno of the ship. I enjoyed the feel of firm land under my feet, and watching the slim, lithe Somalis that wandered through the streets.

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We were very impatient to get into Abyssinia. We put our things into one of the only two first-class carriages on the train. The other was reserved exclusively for the Ras Desta. With remarkable slowness the train pulled out of the station and wound its way in and out of the low, scrub-dotted hills. Now and again startled gazelles, jackals, and hyenas bounded away. On nearly every telegraph pole sat a bald-headed vulture.

We came to the Abyssinian frontier, and while we were showing our passports to a white-robed Ethiopian official we heard marching feet and military commands. I put my head out of the window, and saw five Abyssinian soldiers marching towards the train. Four appeared to be privates, and one a sergeant. Two of them carried their rifles at the trail, and the other three sloped over their shoulders. They passed our carriage and halted in front of Ras Desta.

It was very hot, and the midday sun blazed down from a cloudless sky. Without any word of command the bare-footed privates retreated a pace or two off the burning stones. The sergeant, who wore black buttoned boots, gave the command to present arms. This was repeated three times. The train still showed no signs of leaving, and the sergeant, who was not sure of the procedure, thought that he had better continue presenting arms until something happened. Ras Desta was the Emperor's son-in-law and any displeasure or slight he might feel might at least lose

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him his job, if nothing worse. One of the soldiers apparently thought that he had done more than enough to earn his day's wages. He didn't see why he should bother to present arms any more, so while the others presented arms he remained standing at ease. In angry tones the sergeant repeated the order and they all began to talk at once. For a moment it looked as if there was going to be a fight, but thinking better of it, he turned and walked away. Wilfred and I laughed at this comical incident, which caused the sergeant still further displeasure. At this moment, fortunately, the train puffed and pulled and slowly struggled on.

I doubt if the train went ten miles an hour, and sometimes it certainly went a good deal slower. Frequently the train stopped and a man climbed up the poles to mend the broken telephone wires. While he did this I tried to catch butterflies, and never found any difficulty in catching up the train after it had started.

The Danakils frequently stole the rails to make new spears. In the early days, when the railway was first built, the Danakil braves used to stand between the rails with their spears, thinking they would kill the puffing monster that passed through their country.

At Dire Dawa the train stopped for the night. We stayed in a delightful rest-house covered with purple clematis and surrounded by tubs of brilliantly coloured tropical flowers. Most of our things were locked in the carriage. We took a suitcase each and walked

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through the Customs. Immediately natives grabbed our cases; they laughed with excitement at the thought of being able to look through a white man's things.

Wilfred, with great presence of mind, produced his passport. The year before he had gone to the Coronation of the Emperor and had stayed at the Legation, so on his passport was the Legation stamp. This had immediate effect upon the Abyssinians, as all Legation property is allowed through the Customs without examination. Sadly they refastened the cases and handed them to porters to carry to the rest-house.

We had dinner, and Wilfred asked the keeper of the house if he could send the Ras Desta's secretary to speak with us. He came while we were drinking our coffee. Wilfred said that he would like to speak to his master, whom he had met at the Coronation of the Emperor, and to introduce me. He returned a few minutes later and said that the Ras Desta Dempta would be pleased to see us and would we follow him. We found the Ras sitting in a summer-house enjoying the cool of the evening. He was a very good-looking man, and like all the Abyssinian nobility spoke in a quiet, gentle voice. After he had inquired about our expedition and expressed the desire that we should visit the provinces over which he was governor, he told us of the game and beautiful scenery we should see, and assured us that we would meet again in Addis Ababa. We bowed and said good night.

We had at last shaken off the displeasing sight of the

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natives walking about in civilised clothes. Here they merely wore white loin cloths and carried swords or spears. An old Abyssinian came up, bowed, and handed me a piece of paper. It was a little note, scribbled by my father twenty years ago; it said that the bearer was a useful servant, and recommended him for future employment. The old man had heard that a Mr. Haig-Thomas was coming on the train, and thought it was my father returning. He had been a good man in his youth, but he had now definitely passed the age when he would be any use on a hard trek. I gave him a handful of small change and told him how sorry I was to be unable to take him on as my "boy."

We felt annoyed that we should have to go up to Addis Ababa to get permits from the Emperor, instead of starting at once down the river. It was thought that unless we were well protected the Danakils would kill us, and we knew the Emperor would give us an escort of Abyssinians. The Abyssinians and Danakils are sworn enemies, and we thought it would be safer to take Danakil servants from near the Hawash.

Their women and children would be left as hostages against our safe return. We were very afraid that the Abyssinian soldiers would sooner or later start running after the Danakil women, and this would bring the Danakils upon us and end the expedition. Greek and Italian explorers before us had both been massacred by the Danakils, and Nesbitt, who had taken a later

A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY MY FATHER NEAR
HAWASH, ABYSSINIA



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expedition four years ago, had made a wonderful journey without the protection of Abyssinian soldiers and only lost four men. However, unless we took the Emperor's soldiers we would not be allowed to start, so it was no use grumbling; we had to make the best of a bad job.

We travelled on. At last we came in sight of Addis Ababa, nestling among the eucalyptus trees. Until the reign of the great Emperor Menelik, the Abyssinian capital had moved from place to place as the fuel was consumed. Menelik chose a good situation for his capital, and planted eucalyptus trees so that there would be a continual supply of fuel.

As the train passed a round mud hut an Abyssinian woman came out of it, and, bowing down with outstretched hands, prayed to the train. The station at Addis Ababa was crowded with important people who had come to greet Ras Desta. For fully half an hour black-robed officials knelt before him. First they raised his cloak to their lips and then, standing, kissed him on both cheeks. At last the greetings were over and the crowd dispersed.

In front of the station was the emblem of the Emperor, a lion with uplifted paw, known as the Conquering Lion of Ethiopia, Protector of the Lamb of Israel. We drove up the hill into Addis Ababa. Each side of the road sat beggars, some covered with syphilitic sores; others were lepers with fingerless hands and noseless faces.

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

I had read a good deal about slavery in Abyssinia, and from what I had read I couldn't understand why civilised countries allowed slavery to exist.

In Addis Ababa, Mr. F. de Halpert, the Emperor's Foreign Advisor and a Member of the Anti-Slavery League, gave me what I believe to be a fairly clear idea about the real state of affairs.

Until quite recently the Abyssinian Rasses had nothing on which to spend their money. In the same way that the Masai keep vast herds of cattle which are useless, so the Ethiopians keep numbers of slaves. One man in Addis Ababa who owned several slaves told them to take some boxes down to the station. The slaves went to the gate and paid porters with their master's money to do it for them. For this they received a good scolding, and their master went so far as to threaten that if they didn't behave themselves he would free them. This was the last thing that they wanted.

The Emperor knows what a catastrophe would follow the immediate freeing of all the slaves, and has done his best to pacify the Anti-Slavery League and to allow the emancipation of Abyssinian slaves to come about slowly and naturally.

AN ABYSSINIAN MARKET



XXIII

THE EMPEROR

WE WORKED HARD choosing servants out of the many that offered their services, buying horses, and preparing for our trek. We were advised to postpone our trip for a month or two as this was the fever season in the Hawash valley. So we decided to fill in the time by visiting the Arussi mountains. We really quite welcomed this change of plan, as it would give us the opportunity to try out our servants, and to dismiss any that were unsatisfactory and still be able to replace them before the journey down the Hawash.

Before the journey started the Emperor expressed a wish to see us. We lunched at the British Legation and were taken by the British *Chargé d'Affaires* to the Palace. It was the custom for visitors to bring a present for the Emperor. We had brought a very fine old French clock. An outside stairway led to a small reception-room, which the Emperor used for informal occasions.

The Emperor sat on a silk-covered throne, his legs crossed under a satin cloak. Two guards stood behind him and his interpreter and a secretary stood on one

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

side. In turn we bowed and shook hands. The Emperor, who is a very hard-working man, had not long to spare. Every little detail in the whole of Ethiopia had to be seen to personally; even our permits to shoot and to travel received his personal attention. His work kept him busy fourteen hours a day. All affairs of State, legal disputes, and foreign policy form but a small part of his daily duties. The only flaw in the administration that we could see was that he was too busy to see that his orders were properly executed. We felt greatly honoured to have even a few minutes with such a busy man as Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia.

He asked after Wilfred's mother and brothers, whom he remembered so well at the Legation. I gave him greeting from my father, who had met him twenty years before. I was very surprised that he remembered the occasion.

"Yes, I remember your father, he was lion-hunting near Jigjigga; I gave him a mule," he said.

We gave him the clock, and as was the custom of Ethiopian nobility, he showed no signs of either appreciation or displeasure. He asked for a report on the unexplored Danakil country that we hoped to visit. His quiet, meek voice seemed out of place in such a great man. He invited us to the Dance of the Priests at the Palace a few days later. We realised that the interview was over, and said good-bye.

The rains were due to cease on August 26th, and it

THE EMPEROR

was now past that date and they were not yet over. The car was unable to get along the muddy road which led to our house. I did not want to ruin my new shoes and walked barefoot. I was to regret this in days to come, as an unpleasant bug called a jigga found its way in under my toe-nail, and thinking this was an excellent nursery laid some eggs under the skin!

The next day we were going for a week-end with Colonel Sandford. He had had a very varied career. While he was a subaltern at Aden he had wished to visit his brother, who was in the Sudan Civil Service, in the Sudan, and seeing that the shortest way lay across Abyssinia, that was the way he was determined to go. He was told that it was impossible, but nothing was impossible to Sandford, and after getting a few mules and provisions he started trekking across Abyssinia.

He made a wonderful journey through miles of completely unexplored country and arrived in the Sudan without losing a man. He was at once offered a post in the Sudan Civil Service and then came the war. He could never forget his long trek across Abyssinia, and after the war was over he settled on a farm not far from Addis Ababa, where he grew everything from strawberries to coffee. He always wore shorts and a shirt and a topee, and was burnt as brown as it's possible for an Englishman to be. Colonel Sandford could speak Amharic and was a great personal friend of the Emperor. I made up my mind I

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

would learn everything I could from him about the country, about which no one knew more.

On Sunday there was a service. I enjoyed it very much. It was held under the shelter of the veranda, while monkeys played in the tree-tops and the sun-birds and paradise fly-catchers flitted from flower to flower chasing the brightly coloured butterflies. We sang hymns to the accompaniment of falling water, as not far distant a stream came tumbling over the cliffs. We spent many days in this delightful valley collecting birds and flowers until we realised that the rains had ceased and that it was time for us to go on trek. We sadly said good-bye to the Sandfords and once more climbed the cliffs and rode over the rapidly drying plains to Addis Ababa.

XXIV

CARAVAN

EVERYTHING WAS READY for our trip. We had to catch the train down to Mojo, about four hours from Addis Ababa, where most of our mules and servants had gone in advance. Oomah, our head man, should have been at the house at nine o'clock. At ten o'clock there was still no sign of him and the train was due to go in a few minutes. Very angry, we went to the station, and just when we had given up all hope of his coming, he arrived, bringing with him Hupitimurium, our new cook.

Apparently Hupitimurium owed debts, and just as he was going to start his creditor arrived with chains, and in spite of Hupitimurium's tears and prayers they were chained together—this is an old Abyssinian law. He sent word for Oomah, who brought money to pay the debts, and hot and out of breath they arrived just as the train was leaving.

We passed the old woman who, as usual, prayed to the train as we rattled and lurched on our way to Mojo.

At Mojo our caravan was waiting and we started at once for Mount Chilalon in the Arussi country. Our

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

path lay among mimosa bushes. Every now and again multi-coloured birds flew across our path. Our boys were very pleased and excited to be on a trek, and ran most of the way singing. As the sun was setting we got on to some high ground and camped. I wandered out to look for some guinea fowl for supper, but was unsuccessful. The head man of the neighbouring village brought us some chickens as a present, and a warning that there were a great many shifters—robbers—in the neighbourhood. We gave our sentries shot-guns loaded with buck-shot, and long-focusing torches. It was a brilliant moonlight night and the hyenas howled. As I lay in my tent I wondered if we really should be attacked by the local robbers, but the night passed off peacefully and before the sun had risen we were on trek again. It was much better for our animals to travel in the early hours before the sun became too hot.

Wilfred was walking in front, as we needed meat for the men. Half a mile behind came the caravan, which I followed, collecting birds. A Galla who was also travelling to the Arussi country asked if he might join the caravan for protection. We had not been marching more than a couple of hours when a tremendous hullabaloo broke out ahead, and Joseph, my boy, who could speak French, said that the caravan was being attacked by shifters.

I handed my .410 shot-gun to Joseph and my rook-rifle to my shikari, and taking my .275 I ran on as fast

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as I could, followed by the boys. We passed a man lying senseless by the side of the road; two others were attending to him; we heard shots ahead. I asked what had happened. They said that the man had been walking beside the caravan, the robbers had jumped out, one had hit him on the head and grabbed his rifle and they all ran off.

The path continued along the base of a hill covered with big boulders. Somewhere ahead we heard more shots.

"They're shooting your servants," said Joseph. "Let's stay here; we may be killed."

I had always imagined I was a complete pacifist and that if I ever had to fight I should shoot to miss, but now my blood was up and had I seen a shifter I should have shot him. It was very hot; we panted over the boulders; for a mile or more we scrambled after them, but the half-naked Gallas were more than a match for us, and just when we thought there was no chance of hearing them again we heard some shots in front. In some open ground we met Wilfred and his gun-bearer.

On the other side of the glade was an almost impenetrable bush. Wilfred had been in front and heard the shouts of our servants and the firing of rifles. He guessed the caravan had been attacked and hearing the shouts getting nearer and nearer had taken up a position in the glade, thinking the shifters would be sure to cross in front. A few minutes before I arrived

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a shifter had broken cover carrying the stolen rifle. Wilfred's boy shouted to him to stop, he did not, so Wilfred fired over his head, and in a few more strides he threw himself into the cover of a thick bush. We thought it was useless to pursue further. The rest of the shifters had disappeared a different way. We discussed plans for collecting the local villagers and trying to round up the lot on a hill where their retreat was known to be.

Oomah had been watching the chase from a high rock. He saw the shifter throw himself into the bush and had seen that he did not go on. He thought Wilfred and I were much too hot-blooded and would get killed, so he said nothing about it, and kept his eyes on the man. As soon as we had moved off he crept up to the bush and took a shot at the man's head.

Oomah was not a very good shot, and though at point-blank range, he missed. The shifter pointed his unloaded rifle at Oomah. In the chase the shifter had lost his cartridges, but he hoped to bluff Oomah by aiming at him. Now he realised that his bluff had been called and, dropping his rifle, held up his hands. In a few minutes our boys who had collected rushed at him and hit the poor man with their sticks, cutting him badly.

We heard the shouting and returned at once, very annoyed that we had missed the end of the chase. The head man of the local village, followed by a bunch of

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natives armed with sticks, had now arrived on the scene. We signed papers as witnesses and handed him over to be sent to Addis Ababa for trial. We were just moving off when he shouted to Oomah, who translated:

"If I hadn't lost my cartridges, I would have shot you all like rats. We thought you were Greek traders going to Gooba. We did not know you were mad Englishmen who would risk their lives for a single rifle."

We told Oomah to tell him that we were very sorry we hadn't time to wait and see him hanged. We had important work to do and we must go on.

The head man of the village thanked us for our help and promised to see that the shifter was sent to Addis Ababa chained to a guard. There he would be tried and returned to be hanged near the scene of his crime. The head man knew that this particular shifter had committed several murders.

The next day was one of the hottest I remember. I was riding in front of the caravan with my eyes almost shut to avoid the glare and dust. I felt that something very unpleasant was very close, and opening my eyes saw the white teeth and ghastly expression of a dead man. He had been hanged with a raw-hide strap barely two feet long on a branch so thin it could scarcely hold his weight. His legs, which had dangled within reach of the ground, had been eaten by hyenas. A more repulsive sight I have seldom seen. As I rode

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on I wondered why Nature, whose works were usually so beautiful, should have such a revolting way of disposing of his unwanted body. It seemed so out of keeping with the birds, flowers, and butterflies that gave me such joy to look upon.

A Galla passed us with mules loaded with hides. The rough-made native saddles fitted very badly, and huge sores, some of them several inches in diameter, were the result. Oomah and I rode on together. I told Oomah that anyone in England who kept a mule with sores like the ones we had seen would be imprisoned.

"Yes," said Oomah. "But England is a great country with a good king. His son, the Duke of Gloucester, came to the Coronation and afterwards came on a hunting trip to Chilalon, where we are going. I went with him and expected that the son of the King of England would wear fine clothes and always ride on a horse and never carry his own rifle, as the Rassés do. But no—he always carried his own rifle and marched more often than he rode. Sometimes his clothes got torn and the boys used to say: 'Isn't the King of England a rich man? Can't he afford to have clothes without holes?' Often he would bring a log of wood on his shoulder to the camp-fire, and the boys asked: 'Does his father also make him carry wood in England?'"

Oomah himself seemed to understand that it amused the Duke of Gloucester to live the life of an

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explorer, and do things for himself. But it was inexplicable to the African natives.

"You know that some men are hyena men and can turn into hyenas," continued Oomah. "There are many hyenas howling round us to-night. Perhaps one of them is a hyena man."

I asked him why he thought that some men had the power to become hyenas.

"It is well known that they do. Once I was sleeping in a hut with several men. An old woman had died the night before; she was very old and had no relations who cared for her. No one minded or took much trouble to bury her. A few stones were put over her body. I couldn't sleep and felt very afraid. A man next to me got up and quietly crept out into the night. As soon as he was outside I heard a hyena howling. Before dawn he returned smelling of carrion. It was obvious that he was a hyena man and that he had eaten the woman. That morning I walked to where they had buried her, and I saw that the stones had been scratched away and that the body had been eaten by a hyena."

Oomah told the story with such seriousness that I did not like to hurt his feelings, and agreed that it was certain that the man he had seen was a hyena man!

XXV

THE GALLAS

WE CROSSED THE Arussi Mountains. To our dismay three or four horses and mules showed signs of sickness. We marched on, hoping to get down to the warm valley of the Webi Shebeli. It seemed obvious to Wilfred and me that it was not poisonous grass that made them ill, as the Gallas said, but that a fly had bitten them in the hot plains, and the cold climate of Chilaloo brought out the fever.

Our horses and mules dropped by the roadside. Then a passer-by brought news of a great doctor who could cure the disease. Our men refused to go on until he came. He looked at the horses and said that they could be saved, but that first we must buy a sheep. It so happened that he had a sheep with him to sell, and after a lot of argument our servants decided to buy it. The sheep was led round the horses which were gathered together in a herd. Three times he led it round singing an incantation. Oomah explained to us that the horses had a fever, that the fever did not like the horses very much, and that it much preferred mutton. The first time the sheep was led round, the fever which lived in the horses' tummy would smell it

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and become very angry. The second time the fever would leave the tummy and come into the mouth; and the third time the temptation would be too great and the fever would jump out and go into the sheep. There was a great argument as to what was to happen to the sheep which was now full of fever, and was therefore no good to the servants who had bought it, so the doctor said, and it was no good to him. One of the servants had heard of this cure before and said that if the sheep was cooked it would be perfectly good to eat; the doctor finally agreed, and so the sheep was killed and eaten. It seemed to us that the doctor, who had said that the sheep was poisoned, ate a great deal more than his share. He assured them that no horses would die, and wandered back into the mountain from whence he came.

It was now too late to move on, and so we camped. Our boys were overjoyed at the thought of no more deaths among the animals. But next morning there were three more dead and others sick. Our servants wished to go in search of the doctor and get the money back which they had paid him, but we thought enough time had been already wasted. We decided to march on.

We reached the Webi Shebeli. The animals were tired and we agreed merely to cross the river and camp on the far side. I wandered downstream, taking two boys. For several miles the river wound in and out through rocky gorges, in places dropping over cliffs

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

several hundred feet high, and finally flowing through big grassy plains. We rode along its banks seeing a great many mountain reed-buck. By the side of the river I saw some caves in a low cliff. Several Gallas were living in them. I asked the boys to find out if they had any honey, as we were running short of sugar. After a lot of talk I was told that they had no honey, but they knew where there was some, and that a man would come with us and get it, in exchange for some empty tins and bottles.

A completely naked Galla got up from the ground. His wife brought him a dirty cloth, which he wrapped round his waist. His hair was black and curly, his body thin and muscular. He looked intelligent, and probably he was, as he was the local head-man. The Galla led us up a stream which grew narrower and narrower and came rushing through a gorge. A big crack in the rock in front was where the wild bees had their honey.

I had retreated some way, not wishing to get stung. He collected the honey that he had got out and putting it in a skin brought it towards us. Bees followed him. They were sticking all over him, but he never showed the least signs of pain. He put the honey down at our feet, and then walking down to the stream lay in the water. The bees floated off, and after lying there for a moment or two to soothe his swollen limbs, he came up laughing.

Far up the hillside, where there was some level

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ground, we saw a hundred Gallas on horseback. It was a feast-day in the Galla tribe, and they had congregated to take part in a form of tilting on horseback. I rode up to watch the tournament.

Two lines of Gallas stood facing each other. I imagined that they were two neighbouring village sides. One man rode out on a beautiful white pony. He trotted up and down the line shouting. From the other side his adversary came on a little black stallion. Each carried a headless spear shaft. For a moment or two they shouted at each other and then away they went, the black stallion chasing the challenger. I have never seen ponies go through rough country like these two. They seemed to know just what was happening and to enjoy the sport. They galloped all out across the level ground, through boggy patches into scrub, and down a boulder-strewn slope. The little white mare had the speed of the stallion, but looked as if she couldn't stay the pace.

The black began to gain. They had now circled round and were going back uphill towards the madly excited crowd, who watched the contest with rapt expressions, shouting inaudible encouragement. The Galla on the little mare saw that he was being overhauled and giving the pony her head turned round to face his pursuer. He held his spear shaft behind him to try and shield himself. The other Galla poised the headless spear shaft ready to throw. There was a gleam as it flew through the air. The Galla in front

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failed to ward off the throw, and it hit him in the side.

By now two more Gallas were chasing each other, and so the game proceeded hour after hour. The losing side, Oomah told me, had to provide an ox, which would be killed and given to the heroes of the day.

We rode on, little streams came dashing down the mountain side; the fresh green grass sparkled with flowers. It reminded me of a picture I had seen once of the Austrian Tyrol.

Our mules had had a good rest and we had bought others to replace those that had died. We travelled fast, and camped in the middle of a huge plain.

At no time of the year is the country so beautiful as after the rains. Everything is fresh and green. Flowers that had not yet been suffocated by the tall trees carpeted the ground.

We thought that this might easily prove to be a place where locusts bred, as we saw some young locusts clinging to the grass stems, and we asked Oomah to assemble the local natives in the hopes that we could find out their migration. Oomah pointed to a young locust on a grass stem and said to the natives:

“These little animals fly in great numbers and go to countries hundreds of miles away, where they eat all the crops and kill the trees, so that men starve. Now these white men, who in their country are greater

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even than Rassess, have come to seek the place where these little animals are born. They have powerful medicines and want to kill them in large quantities before they fly away."

This was not the strict truth. Oomah was doing his best. The natives talked among themselves, and seemed very interested. Eventually the oldest stepped forward and started to talk. He said he and his tribe were very pleased to see us. He said he was a hundred and sixty years old, and had killed over a hundred men. With great detail he told us of his various battles, and how nearly all his enemies had met their deaths. Nothing would stop the old fool; on and on he went. Oomah, who knew so well how to treat the Gallas, said that we must let him talk as much as he wanted to first, or we would not get any information.

The old fool waved his hand to some young man in the background, and a bullock was led in. This we were told was a present for ourselves. We thanked him very much and he asked Oomah to come to his house and drink coffee, and he would tell us about the locusts later.

The bullock was led away behind a tent to be killed. A minute or two afterwards I happened to stroll round, and to my horror I saw several natives sitting on its head. One had started to cut its throat, and others had already started to skin it. Unfortunately, it was not any of our boys, but the local people who were doing butchery for us. If they had been our

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

servants I would have set about them with the stick I happened to have in my hand. As they were local Gallas and the success of our travels depended on their good will, I could do nothing.

A few minutes later the old man returned with Oomah. He was now going to tell us about the locusts, and later we were going to give him a present.

He was very surprised that such wise men who had come so far didn't know that the locusts came out of the river. Of course the very powerful medicine that the white men would bring would not be able to kill them. For several years no locusts had been seen at all, but vast swarms used to come from the direction of the Webi. Where else could they come from except out of the rivers? We pointed to the young locusts on the grass stems, and showed that their wings were not yet grown, and that they at least could not have come out of the river. Did he not think perhaps that these little animals were born on the plains where we now were? Perhaps huge numbers flew away when the grass began to wither? No. Undoubtedly the few locusts we had seen on the grass stems had come out of the ground. Where else could they have come from?

He would not now talk of locusts any more. He had not got a rifle, and a man of his importance should have a rifle. He had given us a bullock and doubtless we would give him one of our many weapons and some bullets for it. This we were unable to do even if we

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had wanted. Our permits which allowed us to bring rifles into the country had made us promise that we would take them out again. So the old man had to be content with a few cakes of sixpenny soap, an empty tin, a comb, and a cheap looking-glass. He went away very pleased thinking he had been very over-paid for one bullock, of which he had hundreds.

We trekked on and had now reached the edge of the gigantic plateau. Two thousand feet almost sheer below us was hot, dry country covered with thorn bushes and cactus. Some way below our camels were supposed to meet us. Reed-buck were plentiful, and thinking it likely that game would be hard to find in the bush country below, we shot several.

When I arrived in camp the tents were already pitched. As usual, Oomah had chosen a spot with a delightful view. A winding valley with a stream in the bottom and high mountains in the background faded into the dim distance.

An old man walked slowly up to the camp. By the time I arrived there he was seated on the ground and was talking to Oomah. He talked in a low, whining voice, and I imagined he was a beggar. Oomah spoke to him very roughly. The old man got up and walked away. It had been a long, tiring day and I sat down and ordered tea before I set out to explore the mountains behind. Oomah began to laugh and said:

“That man told me that he was a very old man, his

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

relations were all dead, and that nobody cared for him. The villagers where he had lived had turned him out, and he knew that he was going to die, and that he had been looking round for a place to die in. He had seen the caravan going up the road, and wished to die by the white man's tent."

"But, Oomah, the poor old man has gone away. What has happened to him?"

"Yes, sir," said Oomah. "I told him that the white men did not want a dirty corpse lying around their tents, and that he must find somewhere else to die."

I felt sorry for the poor old man and said that if he came back again they must not send him away, as I should like to talk to him and cheer him up. After tea I followed in the direction where he had gone; we came to a path that led to a very steep cliff. On the top were flat grassy plains, and I was afraid that he must have thrown himself over, as we would have seen him had he been on the top.

XXVI

A POISONED THORN

EARLY NEXT MORNING we descended a very steep stony path into the hot dry country below; we had a long march, and it was very hot indeed. A baby reed-buck and a baby duicker, which we had caught in the high ground and had fed from a bottle, died immediately.

I was riding along ahead of the caravan; thorn bushes overhung the path, and feeling a sharp stab in my knee I saw a thorn had penetrated and broken off. I dismounted at once and taking out my iodine pencil iodined the spot, but I was unable to get the thorn out. Unluckily for me, it happened to be a thorn that had scratched some unhealthy animal a few days before. We pitched camp by a little stream well sheltered by tall trees. My knee was swollen and already suppurating. I went to my tent and after washing it opened it up with a small surgical knife from the medicine chest, and removed the thorn.

High overhead were vultures' nests, and apparently young vultures had just hatched out, for the old birds flew to and fro feeding the young ones. It was a most beautiful spot for a camp. A clear, bubbling stream full of fish ran past in front of the tents, and the tall

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trees sheltered us from the blazing sun. A boy met us who said that our camels were still four days off, that they were all well and travelling fast. Later in the evening two of the boys who had been sent to buy corn arrived; they had not been able to get nearly as much food as they wished. The reed-buck that we had brought with us were already beginning to go bad with the heat, and it looked as if we should be short of food.

I set off down the stream with my rifle and a fishing rod. In every pool were shoals of coarse fish, most of them very like the fish I used to catch in the Thames. There was a small kind of chub, and fish very like roach and dace; there were also cat-fish and a kind of perch. Fishing was very easy, and in a short time I had a few dozen, which I sent back to camp by one of my boys. My knee was very painful and was oozing badly, but I stupidly went on down the river, hoping to find game.

I was wading down in a beautifully deep pool when I saw a crocodile within a few feet of me. He was not very big, but quite big enough to have seized me by the leg and drowned me. In an incredibly short time I was on the bank and shouted to my boy to bring my rifle. The crocodile was lying in about three feet of water and I thought it just possible that I might be able to shoot him. My boy was very excited, and implored me not to go too close in case he should swing his tail round and knock me into the water. I

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lay down some feet above him and fired, but the three feet of water was too deep and the bullet barely stung him. He swam away into a deep part of the pool. I took a spear that my boy was carrying and after crossing the stream crawled on to a rock overhanging the place where the crocodile lay. By submerging my arm I could reach him, and thrust the spear as hard as I could into his back. I might as well have tried to drive it through an armoured plate. The spear-head bent and the crocodile swam farther down the pool. After twenty minutes of poking and prodding I drove him into the shallow water. My boy was very excited, and begged me to come away, saying that the crocodile would knock me into the water and swallow me, and when he returned to camp Oomah would not believe him.

I was very surprised at the slow, sluggish movement of the crocodile, and I couldn't see how he could move fast enough to be any serious danger to an active person like myself; and so, taking the spear, I waded in towards him from behind. I knew that he would have to turn before he could seize me by the leg, and I was confident that I could keep out of the way. I was now within a few feet of him, and putting my arm under water I brought the spear-point a few inches behind his front leg, and with all my might drove the spear into the soft skin. I felt the spear pierce and sink into his body. With a swerve the crocodile turned and grabbed the spear in his mouth. I leapt on

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to the shore. He had bitten through the tough wooden handle just as if it had been a piece of celery, and the broken shaft floated to the surface. The crocodile came to the head of the pool; I could see the hole in his side where the spear had gone in. Again I came up behind him, and drove the broken end into the wound. This time he turned and came for me. With a leap I was on the bank. He thrashed the water with his tail, and in a moment or two turned over on his back dead.

We dragged him out by the tail; I was glad that I had killed him, for I knew that many of our boys were fishing down the river behind me and might have been killed by the crocodile. We cut him open and found that inside were several pounds of big round pebbles, several half-decayed cat-fish which he had apparently caught that morning, and a few small bones, which probably belonged to a baby bush-buck.

I fished on down the river, having left a large quantity of fish in the shade of a rock to be picked up later. It was the most beautiful stream; the water was quite clear and just warmer than tepid. Dense jungle surrounded it, and monkeys played in the tree-tops. Small green parrots flew hither and thither; and once I saw grass swaying as a leopard bounded away.

On our way home, as the corner where we had left the fish came into view, I saw a party of baboons. I was very much amused to see two baboons on their honeymoon sharing a very small stone in the middle

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of the river. Apparently they had eaten some of the fish and thrown many more back into the river. When they saw me they scampered away into the trees, the babies riding on the backs of their mothers. I was rather annoyed that our fish had been stolen, but thinking that the others had had the same luck as myself, I thought that there would be plenty to eat. In camp there was trouble. I asked Oomah what it was all about.

"It's like this," he said. "If we eat the fish quickly we get the bones stuck in our throats; and if we eat slowly we do not get our share."

I laughed at the little misfortune, which I had thought was something more serious. I asked Oomah how it was that if I shot a reed-buck and it was dead before anyone cut its throat, none of the Moham-medans would eat it, but if I came back with a string of fish there was no fuss?

"Well, sir, it's like this. If you shoot a reed-buck or any animal and it is dead before we can cut its throat, *you* have killed it, and you are not a Moham-medan. We must only eat meat killed by one of our faith. When you catch fish you only take them out of the water and Allah kills them."

Soon after, some of our boys returned with honey. I was rather surprised, as the only bees we had seen had been in natives' hives, hung in the trees.

One of the men was suffering from toothache, and

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at last, unable to bear the pain any longer, asked me if I would pull it out. I looked at his mouth; one tooth was completely rotten and another large tooth had a great hole in it, and was obviously giving pain. I told him through Oomah that I did not think it was possible to get the tooth out without breaking it. He asked for the pincers to be given to him, saying that if I, whom he knew to be a great doctor, would not do it, one of his friends would try. I knew they would make a worse mess of it than I should. I told him I knew how white men pulled out teeth, and if he really wanted I would try. He opened his mouth and I seized the tooth with the pincers, and as I expected it broke. He was overjoyed to see part of the tooth come away; an abscess had broken and this had relieved the pain. I made him wash his mouth out with disinfectant, and then he begged me to do the same with the other tooth, saying I could cure him if I wanted. I gripped the tooth with the pincers twisted and out it came. My reputation as a dentist was made. After this several others came to me with teeth they wished pulled out, but I never again attempted to pull out teeth that I was sure would break. I imagined the teeth would eventually fall out by themselves, and that a broken one would only increase the pain.

Next day my leg was very stiff and other sores were appearing farther down, and no disinfectant that we had seemed to be strong enough to cure it. However,

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we thought that as soon as the camels arrived we would be within a week's trek of Hawash station and I could go to Addis Ababa and have my leg seen to, before the difficult trek down the Hawash river.

The next day I stayed in camp. To my dismay an abscess started to collect under my tongue and at the back of my throat. I stayed in bed, feeling very sick.

Wilfred went out hunting. Towards the evening I heard a lot of talking and Oomah came to my tent and said that one of our boys had cut down a tree containing a bee-hive and had stolen the honey. About twenty Gallas had arrived with spears and had refused to go until the hive had been paid for. Now Oomah knew that we had run out of money and had not got the sum they asked. He refused to admit that they had any proof that our boys had cut down the trees. Had they seen him? No. But a tree within half a mile of camp had been cut down with an axe; here we were; and it was obvious we had done it. Finally Wilfred returned and searched through our things and found three dollars. Oomah went to the Gallas and told the usual story that we were great princes and friends of the Emperor, and though in no way responsible for the falling of the tree, we were sorry for them, and that as we were very rich men we would give the owner of the hive three dollars.

There was a great deal of talk and discussion, and

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after we had given a few cakes of soap and a little bottle of scent to the head man everything was settled peacefully. It was unfortunate for us that the owner of the hive had been to Addis Ababa and knew the value of money.

Once I saw the boys talking about me. They looked at me several times and talked among themselves. I took Oomah aside and said I wished to know exactly what they had said. At first Oomah hummed and hawed a great deal, but after I had promised I would not be angry whatever it was, he agreed to tell me.

"They say, sir," he said, "that all Europeans are strange, but none of them had ever seen one so strange as you. When any ordinary person would sleep in the middle of the day, you run after butterflies with a net. You shoot little birds and skin them; and if there is an easy way to walk up some rocks you go and choose a way where you have to climb; and when you come to water, if it is cold or warm, you take off your clothes and jump in head-first."

The next evening the camels which we had sent for arrived, and as the beautiful, graceful animals came into the camp they grumbled and growled to each other, and lay down under the trees. The men had been delayed by trying to find a way round some rough ground, over which the camels did not like walking. The camels were in splendid condition, and as there was a full moon we decided to set off and march through the night, and so we now said good-bye to the

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men whose mules we had hired to bring us this far. The moon was high in the heaven when we started off on trek. It was so delightful trekking along with the slow easy gait of the camels.

My throat was so painful I could not eat any solid food and could only talk in whispers. The next two days were uneventful and we made good treks towards the Hawash. We met a native who told us that he knew a short cut, and that he would guide us. He said that one day's march ahead was a coffee plantation and Europeans, and that they had a lorry which went to Hawash station. I was feeling very ill, and told Wilfred I would ride on ahead to the plantation and get them to send me into Hawash, and from there take a train into Addis Ababa. I felt pretty certain that the abscess in my throat would have to be opened, and that after a day or two's convalescence in the cool mountain air of Addis Ababa and with good food I would be fit enough to continue the journey down the Hawash. So I told Cassami—my favourite boy—to call me an hour or two before dawn and get a direction from the guide.

Cassami called himself an Abyssinian, but I have strong suspicion that his father was one of the Indian soldiers who had come to guard the Legation. The Indian soldiers that I had seen at the Legation were fine big men, obviously from one of the mountain regiments. Cassami was a very fine-looking man and was not in the least like an Abyssinian either in

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character or appearance. He was always respectful, efficient, and a very good friend. Unlike most African natives, you could treat him as a friend without his becoming above himself and quite impossible.

It was pitch dark when I found Cassami's hand on my shoulder. I managed to drink some tea and eat a little porridge. There was no point in taking food with us, as I could not eat and Cassami said he would not need food until we arrived at the coffee plantation that evening. We still had a few horses as well as the camels. We took two horses and rode on. It was beautifully cool and fresh; the first light of dawn was appearing in the east and birds began their chatter. Now and again there were rustles in the bushes as a bush-buck or lesser koodo bounded away.

Our path led down to a valley, down which ran a biggish stream of ice-cold water. It must have come out of a spring to be so cold and fresh. We allowed our horses to rest and graze, and then crossing the stream, which was alive with fish, we rode up the hill on the opposite side.

It became extremely hot, and the way was steep and very rough. We were quite certain that the camels wouldn't be able to follow the path which we now rode.

Through the trees a field of maize opened out before us, and on a platform lay a sleeping native. He had nothing on, and his brown flesh was clearly visible between the net-work of branches. Cassami asked

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him if we were on the right way. He was sound asleep; Cassami prodded him with the barrel of his rifle. He woke up and cursed, and being in a bad temper he refused to give us any information.

At the far end of the field of maize were a few Gallas' huts, but they were deserted. We rode up a hill. There had been a shower of rain lately and the sandy path retained all the tracks. We saw the tracks of a man followed by those of a lion. Every now and again the pud marks of the lion were clearly printed on top of the human tracks. For nearly an hour we followed the watercourse, and expected to see where the lion had made his kill. We heard the sound of running water and came to a clear gravelly stream in which the tracks disappeared.

We rode our horses across, but nowhere on the other side could we see a path. First we rode downstream for about a mile; the far side of the river was jungle—long grass and a very virulent stinging nettle which made us gasp with pain every time our legs pushed against it. We knew that there must be a path somewhere, and went upstream for a couple of miles. Just as the light was beginning to fade we heard a lion roar in the jungle ahead.

I did not want to sleep in the open. It looked a very bad mosquito country. We were almost giving up the search for a path leading into the jungle as hopeless when we saw cattle-tracks on the banks beside us. We followed the tracks down a path; now and

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again we heard the lowing of cattle and we knew there must be natives near by. The path led us into a glade.

A fire was burning brightly and half a dozen Gallas sat beside it. Cassami shouted to warn the Gallas of our approach, for excitable natives are apt to let off rifles after dark. At his call they stood up without alarm, Cassami jumped off his horse and held my bridle while I dismounted.

He explained to the natives that we had been hunting, and that our caravan was close behind, and would arrive any moment, to camp in the glade. We didn't want the Gallas to know that we were lost without friends close at hand. We each had a good rifle, but if the Gallas guessed the true state of affairs they might easily cut our throats and throw our bodies into the jungle.

Cassami asked them how far we were from the coffee plantation, and we were greatly surprised to hear that none of them had ever seen it, but that they had heard that it was two days' ride. A little boy brought me a big bowl of milk, and, smelly though it was, I drank it, for I had had nothing to eat since breakfast. Laying my head on the saddle I closed my eyes. I lay listening to the Gallas singing. The cattle had been driven into the glade, which had been surrounded by a zareba of thorns to keep out lions. The only entrance not blocked up was the one we had come in by. Cassami thought I was asleep and I felt

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him gently covering me up with his blanket, which he kept tied behind his saddle, and thinking he would be hurt if I said I did not want it, I let it stay.

I woke up early in the morning and found him seated cross-legged; he had not slept at all, as he had not trusted the Gallas. I told him to sleep, but he refused; and said we must start right away. The Gallas were now awake, and he asked if one would guide us to the coffee plantation. None of them wished to come, as there was a feud with a local tribe, and no one liked to return by himself through their country. So we wished them good-bye, thanked them for their milk, and gave them some aspirins, which Cassami explained was a cure for any illness.

We rode on all day through the broiling sun. The ponies felt the heat even more than we did ourselves. For a short time in the middle of the day we rested by a stream and I ate some fruit rather like unripe tomatoes, which grew near by. They were sour but refreshing. On and on we rode. Occasionally my knee would suppurate, and the sores down my leg grew larger and larger. The abscess in my throat had grown enormous, and I was feeling just about as ill as it was possible to feel. Some of the time I hardly realised the way we were going and my pony merely followed Cassami's. There was still no sign of the coffee plantation anywhere, and when the sun was beginning to get low we saw some natives building a zareba. Cassami said they were Somalis and very good

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men. We brought our horses into the zareba, where they grazed peacefully with the camels.

Yes, the Somalis had passed the coffee plantation the day before. It was an easy ride. They brought me some warm camel's milk in a nice clean wooden bowl; I drank it and soon fell asleep. Cassami too slept, because he knew the Somalis were trustworthy. He woke me several hours before dawn. Our ponies were now weak with fatigue and lack of food, so we had to ride in the cool hours instead of the heat of the day. The Somalis again brought me milk and gave Cassami some sour bread. I was now unable to speak at all, and thought that at any moment the abscess in my throat would burst. A good path, along which the camels had come the day before, led to the coffee plantation, and our ponies trotted along at a good pace. Before the sun became really oppressive we saw great rows of coffee bushes. Soon we pulled up before a comfortable looking ranch house.

A Dutchman, Mr. Tickler, came out, and seeing me in the last stage of fatigue and illness led me into the house and put me to bed. Tickler looked like an English colonel from a very old aristocratic family. The light tropical suit he wore was spotless; he was clean shaven, his hands manicured; and he welcomed me into his house as if he had issued an invitation and had long been expecting me. Once inside the mud house, which had been built by Gallas, one might have been in London instead of in the heart of Abyssinia,

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and it was only the native servants that made me realise that I was not in England.

By the greatest piece of luck a doctor happened to be staying there. Mrs. Tickler had had typhus and was now convalescent, and the doctor had not yet gone back to Addis Ababa. He immediately produced his surgical instruments and without any anæsthetic or waste of time opened the abscess at the back of my throat. I shall never forget the relief, and was soon sound asleep and well on the way to recovery. I woke up feeling comparatively fit and well, and spent another day on the coffee plantation enjoying the hospitality of my extremely kind host and hostess. The doctor told me I was very run down and must go to Addis Ababa for a few days to convalesce.

My horse was completely worn out and Cassami's was little better, so Mr. Tickler lent us fresh horses and gave us a guide to Hawash. If we rode all day we should arrive in the evening, and I should be in time to catch the train to Addis Ababa.

So Cassami and I set out on the last lap of our journey. The path meandered along, every now and again passing native villages and fields of maize. Towards the middle of the day we came to a hut larger than the average native house. The Gallas told us that a European lived there, and out of the house which still needed a little more thatch to complete it strolled a tall, dark man wearing a khaki shirt and shorts. He bowed and, speaking in French, asked us

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to stop and have a cup of coffee. Two chairs made of bamboo were put in the shade, and a servant was sent to make coffee.

"I am Monsieur Albert. My mother was a Galla and my father an Englishman. I used to be a schoolmaster in Addis Ababa, but with the depression as it is I have not any longer got a job. So I have come down here where my mother used to live.

"I had hoped that one day I would be rich and that I would return to England, because you see, as my father was English, I am English also. I have an uncle who lives in Manchester, but I have never seen him. Before I was quite penniless I left Addis Ababa and settled here with the Gallas. I hoped to start a coffee plantation and perhaps to teach the Galla children to read and write. Of course they will not be able to pay me money, but I hope they will give me food and work for me on my plantation.

"My castles in the air have fallen; instead of adopting my father's nationality I have returned to my mother's. It is so peaceful here, and now I have no worries. I think I will get married and make this my home for ever. What nationality are you and what brings you into this country?"

The dust of the journey had made my throat painful, and I was unable to answer. Later, thanking him for the coffee and refusing his kind invitation to stay with him till I felt better, I rode on to Hawash.

Our path lay over some high ground, and our guide

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told us that we should see the railway. The animals of the Abyssinian highlands changed to those of the African plains, and as we crossed the hill I saw Hawash and the Danakil country. Here and there was a single mountain, like a giant mole-hill rising out of the desert flatness. While we rested and watered our horses by a little pond, across a valley we heard the high-pitched voice of a Galla shouting to his wife, whose hut we could see beneath us. He must have been half a mile away, but she could hear quite clearly what he said and answered back. Like him, she raised her voice at the end of every sentence. Somewhere too, not far distant, we could hear the rumbling of Galla drums. We slept a little and rode on in the evening to the station.

Crawling in front of the rest-house was a footless and handless Abyssinian. The Emperor's orders forbidding the punishment of severing of hands and feet had not reached the village where he lived. He had been caught stealing, and after surviving the punishment had been carried by his relations to the railway line, where he could beg. Not knowing how to give him anything, I dropped a few small coins in front of him, and he picked them up in his mouth. I longed to put a bullet in his head and end his misery, but civilisation does not allow us to do to our fellow humans what we would do at once for any animal.

In Addis Ababa I had another operation on my throat, and no sooner had I returned to Hawash to

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meet Wilfred and continue down the river than another abscess grew and I had to return to Addis Ababa for still another operation. I decided that I would return to Europe and visit the more healthy northern lands.

XXVII

SARDINIA

THE RED SEA was pleasantly warm; so different from the stifling heat of the previous August. The Mediterranean was cool and fresh, and I now felt completely recovered from my illness, and the idea of returning to civilisation was more than I could bear.

I decided to visit the Isle of Sardinia, which is a wild, rough, barren country, with a few last remaining brigands still at liberty. I collected my things together and landed at Cagliari. I found that Mount Gennargentu was the wildest part of the country and abounded with mouflon, the little wild sheep from which all our domestic sheep have descended. The streams were reputed to be full of trout, and one could get permission to stay in a government house used for the repairing of the roads.

With great difficulty I got a cheque cashed, and after a few days' preparations I arrived at a house within sight of Gennargentu with Bastiano, a Sardinian guide. I got him through the police, who told me that as long as I was with Bastiano I need fear no brigands.

He was a little man with a beard, and wore the Sardinian national costume of white trousers, black

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coat, and hat. He could not speak English and I knew no Sardinian, but remembering a few words of Latin and with a fair knowledge of French, I could understand a good deal of what he said.

He had been a guide to F. C. Selous, the great African elephant hunter and explorer, and had lately come out of prison for supplying a local brigand with ammunition and food. At the moment he was very sad, as his great friend Stokino, a brigand, who since the war had defied the police, had just been bumped off. Little by little I learned the story of Stokino.

He had gone out to the war, and had brought fame to himself by creeping out of the trenches at night and returning with five or six enemy heads on a string; these he placed about his dug-out. Towards the end of the war, he returned home on leave, to find his home empty and his wife run off with a Sardinian policeman. It was not long before Stokino found the man and cut his throat, killed one or two relations that happened to be in the house, and kidnapped two children. He took them back up into the mountains and sent a letter saying that unless a hundred lire were given for each child, their bodies would be found on the road. So the children's uncle started up the mountain with the ransom in his pocket. Stokino waited behind a bush, shot him at point-blank range, took the money, cut the children's throats, and dumped all three bodies beside the road.

The Sardinian authorities now began to take action.

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A little minor revenge for a stolen wife was winked at, but everyone thought Stokino was carrying it a bit too far.

Drive after drive was organised; mountains on which he was known to be were surrounded, and an ever-converging circle would meet at the peak, but Stokino was never seen, and only a dead policeman or two were found to show where he had been hiding. Finally they gave up trying to catch him in the macqui. The tall heath was too good a cover, the streams were full of trout, and he had many friends who supplied him with ammunition and food. Year after year went by and Stokino was left in peace and committed no more murders.

Rumours came to headquarters that his retreat was on a certain mountain and it was thought useless to organise a drive as he was sure to slip through the cordon. The mountain was watched. A shepherd was often seen going into the macqui, sometimes with food or clothes, and they were convinced that he was keeping Stokino supplied with the necessities of life.

One day he was arrested, and he was told that he must either do Stokino in or go to prison for several years for aiding and abetting an outlaw. He was given a rifle and told to shoot him, but the shepherd said that Stokino had sworn to kill anyone who came armed to the mountain, and that he would rather find some other means. He promised to do his best. He

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returned to the mountain and tip-toed to a hole under some rocks where Stokino lived.

It was a hot, sunny day and Stokino was fast asleep. The shepherd came right up to him, and picking up a huge stone which he could barely lift he let it drop on Stokino's head. So Bastiano was still in mourning for his old friend.

Bastiano found the first wild sheep. I had searched the hills with the glass and had seen nothing. Then, while I ate my lunch, Bastiano searched, and suddenly he grunted excitedly and pointed. On the slope facing us and about a mile away, were seven mouflon; there was one good ram, and I watched him for a while. He had a pale saddle-mark of grey, while the rest of him looked dark brown, with a lot of black and white about his legs. His protective coloration was almost perfect, for he was exactly like two macqui bushes with some rocks in between.

After watching for some time we decided to try a stalk, and I set off at once, leaving Bastiano to keep the beasts under observation. The stalk was an easy one, and I was soon within sixty yards and ready for the shot.

On closer examination, however, the ram which I had watched appeared not to be so very big. By my permit I was only allowed to shoot two, and if the stalks were all to be as easy as this, I should no doubt come upon at least two rams with bigger heads than this one. I could afford to leave these; so feeling that

MOUFLON GROUND IN SARDINIA

Photo by the Author



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I was making a magnificent gesture, I stood up and the mouflon cantered off. Little did I know that I should soon be stalking with infinite care any bunch of mouflon that contained a ram at all!

We spent many days together hunting the mouflon in the macqui. Sometimes Bastiano would stop and whistle, and answering whistles would come from the heath. Occasionally a man would come out and speak to Bastiano, but I never knew what they said or whether they were only shepherds or outlaws.

During the early days we often used to track the mouflon, but later we found this method almost useless. Sometimes we thought ourselves close behind and would follow a whole day, without getting closer and without the tracks showing any apparent sign that the mouflon were alarmed. At other times, when our hopes were high, we would come suddenly to where the ground was hard and rocky and the tracks would disappear.

Even had we come close upon the mouflon I believe that in the macqui they would have seen us long before we saw them, and, once alarmed, they would have moved so far and so fast that we should never have had a chance of a shot at them. But, although the parties were seldom more than half a dozen strong, the ground was often covered with tracks, and it was tempting to follow them.

Once the tracks led to a hollow, and we felt certain that the sheep were somewhere in the bottom of it.

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As we emerged on the edge there stood a wild boar quite close to us. He had not seen us, for he was occupied in scratching his ear with his hind leg. The rifle was ready, but I was convinced that the mouflon were near and we had been tracking them all day. So the boar trotted off into the macqui; but the mouflon were not there—they had just vanished.

One day we were returning late and saw a light. Bastiano whistled and an answering whistle came in the usual way. We came to a little clearing in some trees, and there was one of the wildest-looking men I have ever yet seen. He had shoes made of pieces of motor tyres, which were tied round his feet. Several rags sewn together and tied round his waist were all his clothing. His shoulders and chest were bare. He was living in a hollow tree. When he lay down his feet stuck out, and he had built a little wigwam of sticks to shelter them.

He had several slices of wild boar on a long green stick. Every now and again he held a piece of fat over them to let the grease drip on to the meat; it looked good and smelt even better. I had some chocolate, which I gave to Bastiano's wild friend, and I gathered we were invited to stay to dinner.

He and Bastiano talked for a long time, and I heard the word "police" mentioned on several occasions. Bastiano said that the man was a shepherd, but I rather suspected that he was fleeing from justice. The roast pork was very good; how he killed the boar I did not

BASTIANO AND MY MOUFLON

Photo by the Author



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know, because he didn't seem to have any weapons of any kind. A day or two later when we passed the same way he had gone and we never saw him again.

At last, one day, we were lucky. On the far side of a crater-like hollow, about three-quarters of a mile away, were four rams feeding peacefully. Leaving Bastiano to watch them, I set off to make a detour which would bring me to within a few hundred yards. Once there I hoped to be able to devise a method of completing the stalk. After walking over very rough ground for about an hour and a half I reached the point from which I was to plan my final crawl. To my dismay, nowhere could I see the mouflon. Then, as I searched the hillside, I heard a faint and far-away "ba-a-a" coming from across the crater. I raised myself higher to continue my search and suddenly saw the mouflon standing not fifty yards away and looking intently in the direction whence came the distant "ba-a-a." As I raised my rifle they saw me and galloped off towards the crest of the hill. Hastily choosing the biggest ram I took a snapshot and down he came, stone dead. He was not a big mouflon; indeed, he was no larger than the one I had earlier spurned; but after so many disappointments we were pleased enough.

It was not until we returned home, however, that I discovered, through one of the road-menders who acted as an interpreter, what exactly had happened. Bastiano, who had the glasses, saw that the mouflon

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had stopped feeding. He saw that they were slowly going over the hill towards the north, where they could lie down in the shade. He knew also that I must be nearly there, and that if he could detain them even for a few minutes I might get a shot. Wherefore he spent a quarter of an hour "ba-a-a-ing" with the full force of his lungs, while the sheep stood watching and wondering what all the fuss was about!

One morning it was very foggy, much too foggy to stalk, and I decided to fish. I never imagined so many trout could live in such a tiny stream. It was clear and overhung on both banks with macqui, from which caterpillars and insects of all sorts continually dropped. A very short rod was wanted and it was only possible to throw one's fly a few feet here and there under the tall heath. I fished for several hours and caught eighty-nine trout. I very much hoped to make it a hundred, but soon after mid-day they stopped rising, and though I fished with the greatest care I could not get a rise of any kind.

We walked back down the road and met three Sardinian policemen carrying rifles. I showed them my fish, and they asked for my permit; I knew perfectly well what they were saying, but I thought it better to pretend not to understand, and made signs and invited them to return to the house and have a drink. We ordered trout for dinner and gave the rest to the men working on the road, of which there were about ten. Bastiano and I had several big jars of wine,

A SARDINIAN SHEPHERD

Photo by the Author



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as he did not like the taste of water. We had an enjoyable party and the policemen got so drunk that they went to sleep on the floor, and when they woke next morning Bastiano and I had gone out stalking.

A day or two later a letter arrived written in French asking me to call at the police-station some fifteen miles away, as the Chief of Police wished to know why I did not have a permit to fish. A letter in Sardinian also arrived for Bastiano telling him that he was to bring me there.

As it happened to be through good moufflon ground we decided to stalk and return and sleep at the police-station in the evening. We walked about all day, and saw several moufflon, but they, as usual, saw us first. As we came down on to the road leading to the police-station, I met one of my policeman friends who had got drunk on our wine. He smiled and led the way.

Apparently it was the birthday of one of the police and there was going to be a party that night. A whole kid was roasting on a fire in front of their house. The Chief of Police welcomed me, and I went into his office. I gathered that the party had already begun and the new dance, the Charleston, which had just come to Sardinia was the rage.

The Chief took particulars that I had no fishing licence and said that this would have to be reported to Lanusei, and that it was a very serious offence. He asked me to stay for dinner and offered me a bed

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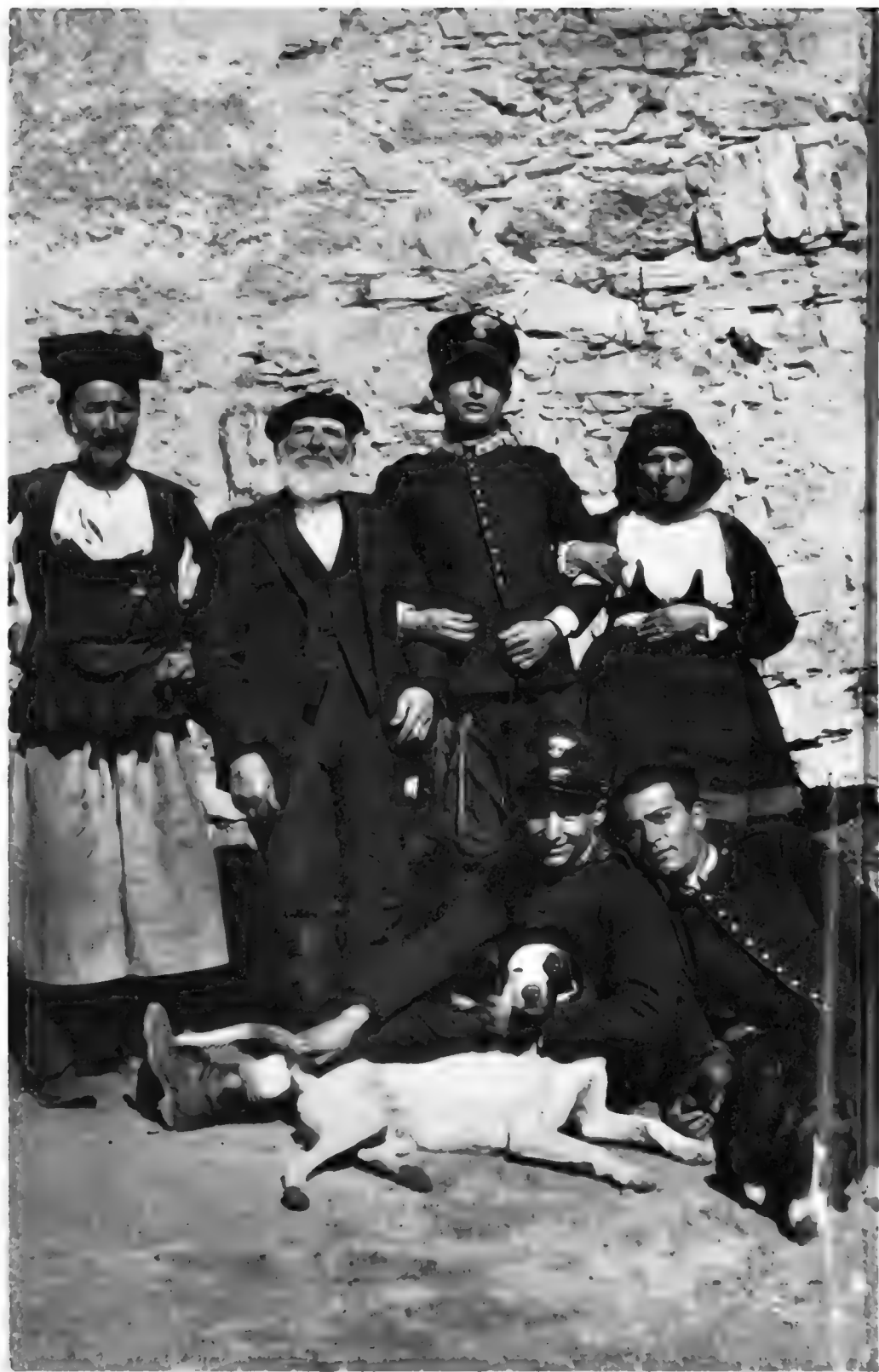
for the night if I did not mind sleeping in one of the cells.

We ate the kid and drank large quantities of red wine. The Chief confided to me that he was having great difficulty in learning the new dance and I promised to give him lessons. As the evening wore on we became great friends. He tore up the report which was going to be sent to Lanusei and gave me permission to fish wherever I liked in the whole of Sardinia without any licence at all. If any gendarme came and asked me for my fishing licence I was to say that Piras had given me permission to fish. Mussolini's health was drunk several times and we held out our hands in the Fascist salute. I took Piras aside and asked him his opinion of the Duce.

Before Mussolini came into power no one ever thought of Sardinia at all; in fact, no one cared a damn what happened to it, but now it seemed to be an important place. Of course it was a nuisance that permits were now required to shoot and to fish, but after all this did not really matter. The system of bribing was being strangled and the policeman's job was not nearly as lucrative as it had been in the past. But Piras was a man of the world and broad-minded. He thought it undoubtedly a good thing, though he wished he had made better use of his earlier opportunities. The Fascist régime hampered what was really a rightful due to those that kept order and risked their lives for the citizens of Sardinia. It was with swaying

BASTIANO AND THE POLICE AND TWO SARDINIAN
PEASANTS BEFORE THE PARTY BEGAN

Photo by the Author



SARDINIA

steps that Piras led me up to the cell where I was going to sleep.

A sleeping board, two or three grey but clean blankets, and Piras' own pillow. He was a good host, and insisted that he should have the hard bench and that I should have his bed. But he had now had so much to drink that he could barely stand, and I gave him a push on to the bed that he was offering me and blew out the candle. Piras was unable to get up, and in a few seconds he was sound asleep.

Early next morning he came in, washed and shaved, and brought me his razor and a towel, coffee, and new bread. It was a lovely sunny day and he asked me if I would like to go and fish with him. He would lend me his rod, which was merely a long cane without a reel. He tied his own flies and fished with a horse-hair cast. So Piras and I wandered down the stream. We took it in turn to fish the pools. I found that great skill was needed to avoid my cast being broken, for although the trout were small they were very quick, and the rod was heavy and without much give. I am afraid I lost several of Piras' flies. We fished up and down the river until we were half-way between the police-station and the road-mender's house. He kissed me on both cheeks and begged me to come and stay with him as long as I wanted and whenever I liked. He gave me several of his flies and we said good-bye. I felt sad when I saw this kind Sardinian, whom I should probably never see again, limping

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

back towards his house—for Piras had been wounded in the war.

Bastiano caught me up and together we returned to the road-mender's house. When we were within a mile of the house I caught sight of four mouflon feeding over the skyline towards us. We could get no closer. The slope which led to them showed not a vestige of colour, for it consisted of green grass, devoid of rocks or macqui. We hoped, however, that when the evening came the mouflon might feed up the slope towards us, and since it was now still early afternoon, it would be light for another four hours. So we set ourselves to wait.

The mouflon were nervous and suspicious. One of them was a splendid ram with horns that curled round in a circle; he stood apart and tossed his head into the air and stamped his foot a little. There was danger about, and it made him fidget. Once or twice he sat down with the others, but he always got up again soon afterwards and walked away.

As the evening came his suspicion increased. Gradually they came nearer and nearer; they were only two hundred yards away. If I did not shoot now it would be too dark. I estimated the distance again at about two hundred yards. Then the big ram stood with his fore-feet on a rock, scratching the back of his neck with his horns and silhouetted against a patch of snow. With a perfect rest I fired—and missed.

The mouflon clattered up the opposite slope, paused

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on the skyline, and disappeared over the top. A few pebbles rolled down the hill and they had gone.

Bastiano, who was an oldish man, got completely worn out by the long walks through the macqui. I spent a few more days stalking the mouflon, but had no more success and felt an urge to return home and see my family. It suddenly occurred to me that my sister Enid was at school in Rome, and I thought I might just as well go and see her on my way back.

Three days later my train pulled into the station at Rome, and only then did it occur to me that I did not know the address where she was staying! It happened to be a big fête day in Rome and all the hotels were full. I met a good-looking young Italian who spoke English and immediately came to my aid. He took me to a little place he knew of and after a long argument with a big fat Italian woman, he told me that the hotel was full but if I didn't mind sleeping behind a screen in the dining-room they would make me up a bed.

I had some sort of recollection that the name of the mistress of my sister's school was Madame Boni. I went to the telephone and, doing my best with a mixture of Latin, French, and English, tried to ring up all the Bonis in the book. The exchange was not too bad, but the only result of my first three calls was a flood of Italian and the banging down of the receiver, which I thought was rather rough usage, as I had only asked if I were speaking to a girls' school

I LEAP BEFORE I LOOK

and if my sister was there. At last a brain-wave struck me. I would ring up the Embassy. No, the British Embassy had not heard of my sister, but by the greatest piece of luck there was a girl staying there who had been at school with her and who could speak Italian fluently. She did not know where my sister was in Rome, but on hearing my plight agreed to ring up all the Bonis in the telephone book until she got the right one.

An hour or two later the telephone rang and I heard my sister's voice at the other end. She did not know where I was and imagined that I was still in Abyssinia. Her term was ending in two days' time and then she was returning to England, so we agreed to travel back together.

We spent the next two days in seeing the sights of Rome. We saw all the pictures, statues, and churches, and all the things that people see when they visit Rome. My sister had been there several months and was an excellent guide. The thing that struck me most about Rome was the delightful place they had for the stray cats. There was a big sunken pit in the middle of the town with long grass. Here all the stray cats were dumped. The place was alive with cats! White, black, tortoiseshell, and in fact every possible kind of cat! There was a fish shop by one of the corners; here one could buy fish and, taking it up to the pit, swing it round one's head till all the cats collected and then fling it down amongst them. I

ARCH OF CONSTANTINE IN ROME

Photo by the Author



SARDINIA

think this and the Zoo were my two clearest recollections of that ancient city.

We said good-bye to Italy and set off for home. How I longed to see London again! I knew that as soon as I got there I should loathe its fogs and smoke-blackened buildings, but just at the moment I longed for a real good dinner, to hear the news, and talk to all my friends.

The little steamer arrived at Dover. How lovely to hear the English porters and to buy an English newspaper! It was raining, but what could be nicer than a nice English rainy day! We stayed in the restaurant-car and drank bad tea and ate sodden toast. There are few things better than returning to England after a long trek ; in fact, there is only one—and that is leaving England on a new expedition.

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